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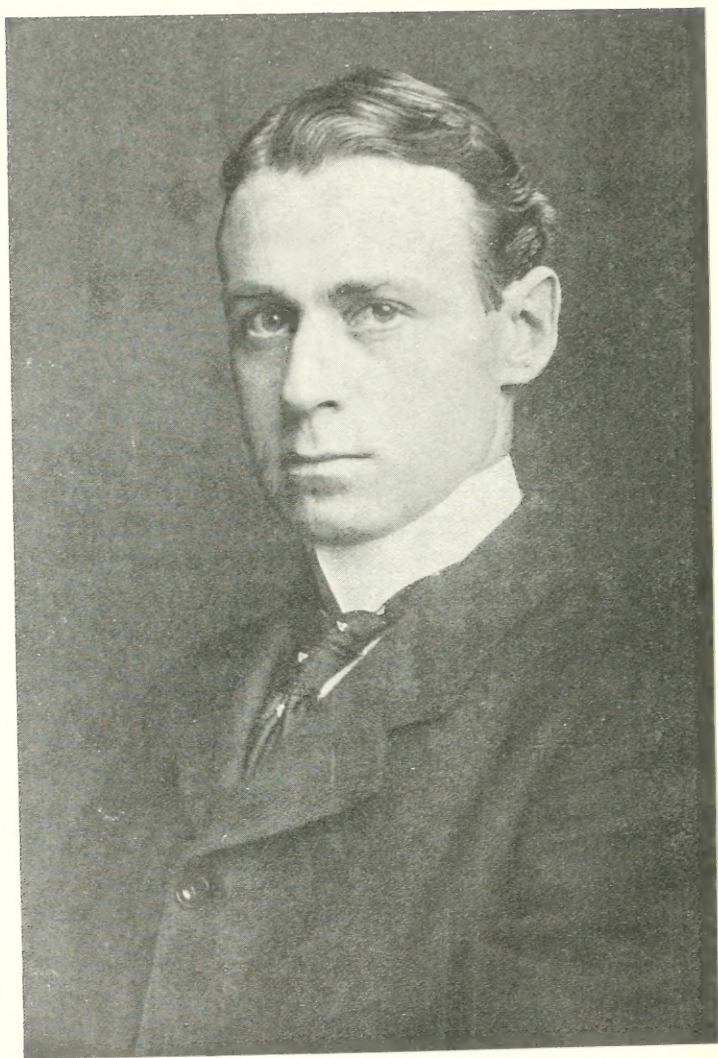
THE CHASE OF DE WET

FREDERICK HOPPIN HOWLAND

THE CHASE OF DE WET.



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THE CHASE OF DE WET

AND

OTHER LATER PHASES OF THE BOER WAR
AS SEEN BY AN AMERICAN
CORRESPONDENT

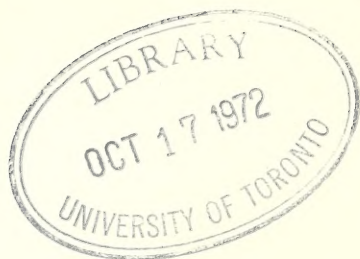
BY

FREDERICK HOPPIN HOWLAND

WAR CORRESPONDENT FOR THE LONDON DAILY MAIL
AND THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

PROVIDENCE
PRESTON AND ROUNDS COMPANY

1901



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CHAPTER I.

FROM THE SOLENT TO TABLE BAY.

The good ship "Scot," still, I believe, holder of the record between The Needles and Green Point, drew alongside her dock at Cape Town, on her fourth outward voyage from England, on the morning of Wednesday, April 24, 1900, seventeen days out from Southampton. No one who loves the sea can regret an hour spent in those pleasant waters that lie between Cape Finisterre and the Cape of Good Hope. We had touched at Madeira, that ill-kept, picturesque garden spot, sunning itself so smilingly in the lovely summer sea, and had spent a few boisterous hours bumping over the greasy cobble-stones of Funchal in palanquins drawn by diminutive bullocks and resting on primitive runners, in deference to the local Portuguese prejudice against wheels. Putting out to sea again, with course shaped due south to round Cape de Verde, we had gazed in awe next day at the noble peak of Teneriffe, rising sheer out of the sea to its majestic height of 12,000 feet. We caught our first glimpse of it in the dawn, and not until late in the afternoon did it flash its last greeting to us from its gleaming pinnacle. And as the ship cleaved her placid way through the tropics and across the line,

our faces caressed by the soft and constant trade winds, we leaned for hours against the rail, watching the dolphins lazily tumbling over the rippling waves and the tiny flying-fishes skimming away from the sides of the great ship, to them the most terrifying of all the monsters of the deep that they spend their harassed lives in fleeing from.

The ship's company were such as one would expect to find voyaging out to South Africa in the spring of that year of grace. The British army, just beginning to retrieve the disasters suffered under Methuen and Gatacre and Buller, was represented on board by half a dozen young officers. One had come all the way from India via England to join his regiment at Bloemfontein: he and a few of the others, you knew at a glance, were of the type of which there was sore need in Africa—keen-eyed, stalwart, intelligent men of blood and mettle. The others were of the raw militia variety, affecting petty mannerisms and poses calculated to invite attention from the women aboard—the kind that spoke contemptuously of “outsiders,” and that one was sure to find later *stellenbosched* in some out-of-the-way corner far from the front. You watched them come down to dinner heavily caparisoned, and sighed to realize that you would probably not be able to hear what Kitchener would say to them in the dread hour when they should make their first mess of things. Then there was a trooper of

Strathcona's Horse, a reckless, devil-may-care fellow, who, after ten years of rough life in the Northwest Territory, craved the excitement of war in Africa; and an elderly retired Colonel from Wales, going out to bid Godspeed to a son about to start for the front, as he explained to us all before we had been twelve hours at sea. In the minds of all these the war was uppermost, though, with the instinctive antipathy of the Englishman against "talking shop," they seldom spoke of it. You saw proof of it only at those rare intervals when we passed a ship homeward bound, in the interest with which they asked the ship's officers the meaning of the message of the signal flags. The answer each time was "No news," and we realized with relief that "The Little Man" was still resting at Bloemfontein after Paardeburg.

Finally, the profession of arms claimed two naval officers. One, retired before his time, had made a failure of life and was seeking an opportunity at the front to redeem a wasted past. The other was on the threshold of a career which, I like to assure myself, will be marked with brilliant service. High bred, "tight and taut from truck to keelson" one might say in nautical parlance, his actions reflected somewhat the recklessness of youth; but he was withal so manly and so jolly, giving off so much of the frankness and the freshness of the sea, of that brave, free spirit with which the sea endows the sailor, that we all

grieved to see him over the side as we dropped anchor off Funchal, where he left us to join his ship.

Of the rest of us, two were pale-faced newspaper men, temporarily released from the London office of the *Daily Mail*, with leave to indulge in a brief vacation at Madeira. To the other passengers the war was an event of interest only because of its effect upon their business. They were mostly colonists returning from a visit home, or gathering at Cape Town to be ready for the half expected collapse of the Boer resistance that would start the wheels of business turning again. Scattered among these were a consignment of raw youngsters going out to take up positions as clerks in the Standard Bank of South Africa. Two young married women, one a bride, going out to be nearer her husband, from whom she had been parted by the outbreak of the war; a bright but fragile Colonial girl; another army officer's wife who smoked cigarettes on deck, but was none the less charming; and a couple of nursing sisters made up the list of fair passengers and contributed the necessary element of frivolity.

The time passed as it usually does under such circumstances, given a company resigned to such congeniality as was possible, and aided by an absence of much restraint and an atmosphere slightly flavored with the recklessness due to an appreciation of the fortunes and risks of war. There were harmless

sports on deck in the daytime, games of a less innocuous character in the smoking-room in the evenings, and the daily auction pool on the ship's run, which brought its usual revelations of the characters of winners and losers. Then the band played for us three times a day; and in the placid equatorial waters, through which the ship ploughed its way on an even keel for days and nights together we danced in the romping English fashion, on the moonlit deck of an evening.

It was a pleasant life that we took to willingly enough. But it was all forgotten in the first glimpse of Table Mountain, grim symbol of a very different world.

CHAPTER II.

CAPE TOWN IN 1900.

Cape Town looks very fair as seen from the sea, nestling in the verdure that covers the base of that great, overtowering rock that is one of the sights of the world. Impressive, too, is one's first view of the harbor and the innumerable docks. As the "Scot" steamed slowly up to her berth on that rare April morning, the busy life of a great port and of a great army's chief base of supplies was all about us. Transports just arrived from England, from Canada, from Australia, and from India, huge numbers on their bows, crowded the roads or rubbed noses at the docks with full-rigged ships from China or tramps from the Brazils. Steamers with the cargoes of war just discharged were hurrying past us out to sea, to meet others heavily laden hurrying in. Great, gleaming-sided warships swung majestically at their anchors here and there. A forest of slender masts and massive funnels hemmed us in so closely that it seemed as if there could be no way forth. And the air was filled with the staccato puffing and rattling of busy donkey engines, the creaking of derrick arms, the hoarse voices of ship's officers calling out orders to

the crews and wharf Kaffirs emptying and filling holds, and with all the accompanying sounds of stir and bustle that go with such a scene.

But at a nearer view the town belied the fair promise it held out from afar. It is true there was life enough about you as you threaded your way in the dingy cab out of the labyrinth of docks into Adderley street. There all was martial bustle, and the tint of khaki was everywhere. Squads of soldiers afoot, troops of horse, batteries of artillery, tramped and clattered and rumbled along the side streets on their way to the squat railway station or to some dusty camp on the outskirts of the town. It all suggested "the front," and "the front" was apparently in everybody's mind. The air of indifference worn by a few *blase* officers strolling along twirling their flimsy bamboo sticks seemed out of place. "When are you off?" was the question heard most frequently when men stopped to exchange greetings on a corner: and the answer, "to-night" or "to-morrow," generally evoked expressions of congratulation or envy as the speakers hurried on again. "The front" was where everybody wanted to be—later I met an officer who was drinking himself to sure disgrace under the weight of orders that kept him indefinitely at Cape Town. Lord Roberts' army was still resting at Bloemfontein; but the knowledge that the forward movement towards Pretoria was about to begin had somehow

slipped past the press censor, and no one with blood in his veins could stay behind content.

And there was nothing about Cape Town to make one glad to linger there. Aside from the troops, it lacked as a city about everything needed to make it attractive. Table Mountain would perhaps dwarf any collection of buildings; but certain it is that the eye, seeking vainly for anything noteworthy along the city's streets, returned always to rest upon that stately peak. The buildings are nearly uniformly cheap and squat; unsubstantial looking, and mostly dirty and badly cared for outside and in. "Poverty, hunger, and dirt" were most forcibly suggested by the normal life of the streets. A general air of untidiness pervaded the town, and was disappointing when one realized that there were prosperous merchants and thriving business houses in what was after all one of the great seaports of the world. It may be that the prevailing wish of the average Englishman to get back "Home" again as soon as he can leads him to regard a habitation in the colonies as merely a temporary one, and thus not worth the care that he would otherwise take to make his surroundings as cheerful and as comfortable as he might; but some such carelessness has left its stamp on Cape Town, and it takes its outward character from dingy hotels, ramshackle public vehicles, and slovenly Dutchmen and Kaffirs, who outnumber the tidy East

Indians whose turbans and gay waistbands give the sole gleam of color and picturesqueness to be seen in the streets. Cape Town was settled only a little later than New York, but it remains to-day comparable only to a third-rate village of the more sparsely settled West or Northwest of the North American continent. It lacks dignity. Its sanitary arrangements, save in the suburban dwellings of the better class, where alone the refinements of life seem to be considered, are hardly better than Havana's were under the Spanish regime. The hotels in the city are indescribably dirty, and the food in the public places far from good. Even the eggs are brought from Madeira, the Dutch being too lazy to keep hens.

The contrast between such surroundings and those amid which the army was moving at the front—between the lazy, even sordid, life of Cape Town and the strenuous work the hosts assembled from the four quarters of the globe were doing with the "Little Man" up country—would alone have been sufficient to make us, whose life was now centered in that of the army, impatient to be off.

I hurried through my preparations, taking what little time I could to learn enough about the Boers to settle most of my doubts as to the respective rights of Boer and Briton; and on the evening of the third of May, after seeing the various bundles and boxes that contained my kit safely stowed away, I took my

place, dressed in khaki, in the corner of a first-class railway carriage in the nightly train for Bloemfontein. A few minutes later we were on our way, and I congratulated myself that the final stage of my journey to the front had at last begun.

The train was filled with officers, with a sprinkling of meek civilians: and besides the carriages there were several trucks well laden with supplies. These were all for the army—it was not until long afterwards that goods for any other consignee were permitted to leave Cape Town. Sharing my compartment were two of the few civilians whom the authorities had consented to permit to go forward. One was a little doctor of Bloemfontein, suffering sadly from asthma. He was greatly depressed at first: but his affliction abated as we gradually reached higher altitudes, and by the second day he was quite cheery. My other companion was a lanky, sour-visaged individual, apparently young, but evidently in very poor health, who had taken prompt advantage of my inexperience of Cape Government Railway methods to appropriate to himself the lower berth I had reserved before leaving.

Thus I spent the first two nights of our dreary journey in the upper berth, unsuccessfully trying to fathom the meaning of the strange glances which I kept meeting in the eyes of the occupant of my lower berth. It didn't make much difference after all what

couch one lay upon—it was simply a matter of climbing. These berths were not beds such as those who travel in Pullman cars are accustomed to. They needed no attention from a porter. Retiring, you wrapped your rugs about you, and lay down in your clothes upon a leather mattress, with a hard bolster under your head for a pillow, and a rail six inches high to keep you from rolling out. But it was such a couch as I learned later to yearn for as a luxury.

The railway northward from Cape Town traverses a dreary, monotonous country almost to the border of the Free State. Pleasant villas, set in smiling gardens, surround the port; but they are quickly left behind, and thereafter for a day you are in the Karroo desert, with a parched plain as level as the sea all around you, and not a shrub to cheer the eye. Nearing the outer border, black rocks begin to crop up on the horizon, which grow later into hills, of softly rounded outlines; and then at last, as one draws near the Orange river, the hills rise into mountains, and you look with relief into blue distances and upon green-clad slopes.

At that time it was a difficult matter to get to the front. One was comparatively unmolested as far as Norvals Pont, the railway station on the border between Cape Colony and the Orange Free State. But there the drift by which one gained access to the enemy's country was guarded by an army Cerberus

who used every device which red tape could suggest to turn most people, and especially civilians, back. There the little asthmatic doctor and I lost our lanky companion. My papers, as well as the former's, however, proved sufficient; and with a complaint about the carelessness of the officials at Cape Town, who had left out a date in copying my permit from Lord Roberts, the young lieutenant who acted as Railway Staff Officer indulgently wrote the endorsement "Permitted to proceed." And on Sunday morning, after an uneventful journey of three days, I duly arrived in Bloemfontein.

CHAPTER III.

THE CENSOR AT BLOEMFONTEIN.

At Bloemfontein I met with my first check. Lord Roberts, with that gracious courtesy which is so prominent a part of his nature, had dictated a telegram to Sir Alfred Milner "gladly according" me permission to accompany his force as press correspondent. But he had sent that message a few days before, when his headquarters were still at Bloemfontein: by the time I arrived there the long-looked-for forward movement had begun, and he was fighting his way across the Vet river when I presented my credentials to Lord Wolverton, left behind as press censor. I have before me now the endorsement which his lordship, in answer to my request for the necessary authority to proceed, wrote across the official copy of my telegram from the Field Marshal commanding-in-chief. This is it:

"I cannot grant a pass to Mr. Howland until I get permission from Lord Stanley.

(Signed) WOLVERTON."

In vain I expostulated and argued; in vain I drew attention to the terms of Lord Roberts's message.

Lord Stanley (he was press censor at headquarters, and as such held in the hollow of his hand "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor") had left strict orders that no correspondent was to go up unless his name appeared on a list left with Lord Wolverton. This list did not include my name. Orders were orders, said the obdurate censor; and as far as the Field Marshal's telegram was concerned, Lord Wolverton could only assume that he had changed his mind since wiring me that I might come.

I sought out the General commanding at Bloemfontein, and a council of war was duly convened, but with no other result than a further endorsement on my papers, signed by the chief of staff, in the following terms:

"Until authority is received from the press censor it is regretted a pass cannot be given you to proceed."

And Lord Wolverton said: "Of course you can try to slip up if you wish, but I advise you not to play any such games." He did consent, however, to let me communicate with Lord Stanley; but the wires were crowded with military matter, and I could not hope to avoid a delay of several days, during which the army would be advancing still further northward. This was galling, because my instructions were to join General Hunter at the earliest possible moment.

and he was then at Fourteen Streams, on the western border of the Free State, moving toward the relief of Mafeking. These instructions I could not carry out until I had seen Lord Stanley personally, and every hour of delay increased the distance I should have to travel to headquarters and back again to Bloemfontein, whence I must proceed by rail around to Kimberley.

However, there was nothing for it but to exercise such patience as I could; so I took a room in the Free State Hotel and gathered notes for a column or two about Bloemfontein.

And that enforced stay in the abandoned capital was not entirely unprofitable. I saw enough to convince me that those good people at home who were crying out against the tyranny and rapacity of John Bull would be greatly benefited by a sight of that pleasant village as it then appeared. Seventy-five thousand troops had camped there for many weeks and departed without leaving a scar. I sat on the stoep of the hotel that first evening and watched the scene on the public square. It was a beautiful evening. The sun had set in that glory of delicate coloring which one rarely sees in other lands, and almost at once the air had become deliciously cool, a welcome change after a hot day. As the wondrous shades of pink and green and turquoise succeeded one another and then began to fade out of the sky, leaving the

half moon and a solitary planet in full possession. little girls in white frocks and sun-bonnets came out of the neighboring houses and began to romp. Small groups of "Tommies" and now and then a company or regiment passed by, the men looking business-like in their dust-worn khaki; and every once in a while a cart went by, drawn by a bullock or a mule, and driven by a nigger as black as the ace of spades, giving every moment or so his sharp cry of "Yek! yek!" to urge his slow-going steeds along. East Indians in turbans, flowing jackets, and putties encasing distressingly thin legs, their black and often handsome faces always severe, passed constantly, chatting lightly but in subdued tones, and taking note of everything. Some of them in passing you said "Salaam, Sahib!" or gave you fuller greeting in their native tongue, calling down blessings, one imagined, on the Heaven-born. Now and again an orderly or a despatch-rider ambled by on his pony, saddlebags and holster full, and side-arms conspicuously displayed. Officers were everywhere, most of them carrying the inevitable little bamboo stick; most of them in helmets, but some wearing the little peaked cap, cocked jauntily over the right ear. A grimmer touch was added to the picture when a piece of artillery went by on its way to the station; and much noise was made by a traction engine. But there was no bustling and no crowding. Everyone

moved in leisurely fashion, now that peace had settled over Bloemfontein; and I wondered what the contrast would be with the same khaki-garbed Tommy at the front.

Next afternoon I found the square much more crowded, the attraction being the band, which played for a couple of hours, and played well, too. Shortly before eight o'clock the square became almost deserted; after that hour, by order of the Military Governor, no civilian could walk the streets without a pass.

The native Boer was little in evidence at any time, which made one realize what the demand was for able-bodied burghers at the front. The town was never very busy, business being constricted within narrow limits owing to the lack of supplies resulting from the monopoly of the railway by the army.

CHAPTER IV.

SEEKING THE ELUSIVE FRONT.

My visit to Lord Wolverton's little office in the posts and telegraphs building of the defunct Boer Government in the early morning of the third day was my last. He had come to sympathize with my eagerness to be off, and on this occasion he greeted me cheerily with the announcement that he had heard from Lord Stanley, who had wired that I might come up. Lord Wolverton at once wrote me out a pass; and within an hour, after hustling together such food and clothing as I absolutely needed and swallowing a hasty breakfast, I was at the railway station.

There they told me that the train for the front left at nine, and that the way was clear to Smaldeel, which had been Lord Roberts's headquarters the day before. But in accordance with what I soon found was the inevitable custom up country, it was long after nine before we were under way. Attempts to keep a schedule had early proved abortive, and had long since been abandoned. The delay in this particular case was due to the necessity of getting off to Cape Town a trainload of sick and wounded soldiers.

We finally started a little after noon. There were

no such luxuries as carriages. The train consisted entirely of trucks choked full of supplies for the front, and a guard's van at the rear end. Several hundred Tommies made up a part of the "supplies." They disposed themselves cheerfully on the top of the tarpaulins which covered the high-piled freight, with no shelter from the broiling African sun; while the Major in charge, with a couple of lieutenants, a scout, a civilian supply agent, and myself, shared the van with the guard. There were not enough seats to go around, so most of us made ourselves comfortable as best we could among the boxes and kit-bags and various other packages and personal belongings with which the floor of the van was strewn.

It is about fifty miles by rail from Bloemfontein to Vet river, which turned out to be "Rail Head," or the terminus at that time of the road. The Boers had blown up the bridge, and beyond there we had to make our way to the front by more primitive means of transportation until the Royal Engineers and the Railway Pioneers had completed the "deviation," or temporary line across the river bed. After working like beavers for three days and nights, they finished the job in record time on the following Sunday, when their supply trains were sent across on their way to the next break, at Doorn river, some thirty miles beyond. The same story had been repeated all the way up country from Colesburg. The Boers as they

retreated blew up the bridges and culverts, and the repairers, following after the advance guard as it cleared the country of the enemy, built their deviations across the various rivers and repaired the damaged culverts in many ingenious ways, that the precious supply trains might not be delayed a moment more than was necessary.

Our train took just seven hours to cover those fifty miles to Vet river. There we were all bundled out in the darkness to find ourselves on the edge of a camp occupied by some 2,000 troops, left behind to guard the mass of stores there accumulated after Lord Roberts's advance columns had driven off the Boers.

The scout, who was bearing despatches to headquarters, the supply agent, and myself, as the three travellers most eager to get to the front, had joined forces. Dumping our luggage out on the veldt beside the line, we took turns in searching for some means of conveyance onward, two doing the searching while the third stayed behind to watch our possessions. This lot at first fell to me. While waiting for the others to return, I was accosted by an officer on duty, a genial captain in the King's Royal Rifles, one of the famous Irish regiments whose valor had placed the shamrock in its present place of honor and inspired the Queen to make her pilgrimage into the Emerald Isle. Capt. Harrison, I found, had spent

several years in my own far away country, within a few miles of my old home; and out there on the veldt, under the Southern Cross and the bright stars of the southern firmament, with the light of camp-fires glimmering about us, we became fast friends, he lending me much aid and comfort as a wanderer from old haunts of his.

We had talked together for a half-hour or so when my two companions returned to report that the advance had moved on beyond Smaldeel, and that we could hardly hope to catch up with it that night. Elliott, the supply agent, reported that a wagon had been placed at our disposal for the night in case we should fail to get on; and Farquhar, the scout, brought news of a Cape cart in camp which we might secure for the few days necessary for our journey. Elliott was for settling down in camp at once; but Farquhar and I felt we ought to make one more effort to get on, convinced that if we travelled all night we might catch up with headquarters next day. But fate was against us. I found Captain Foote, the owner of the cart, bundled up in a greatcoat warming himself by a camp fire, but he was quite naturally unwilling to part with his vehicle, even temporarily. So we were forced to spend the night in camp.

We proceeded to the wagon discovered by Elliott and there were served with a toothsome repast by two obliging Tommies. After satisfying a keen ap-

petite with coffee, a substantial stew, and some bread and jam, we crawled into the wagon and, taking off only our spurs, rolled up in our karosses and sank into dreamless sleep.

Next morning we were up at dawn. Elliott had found the wagon such a luxurious abode that he decided to wait and proceed by it; but Farquhar and I concluded that we must push on at once. Searching out our friend Captain Foote, we finally, with his help, secured two nags, sorry enough to look upon, but promising to carry us at least another stage on our journey towards that elusive front. Farquhar had with him his saddle and bridle, but I was minus both, having perforce left them at Bloemfontein. After a good deal of rummaging, a dilapidated saddle was finally found, which had been taken from a strolling and suspected Kaffir the day before. It lacked girth and stirrup leathers, but to supply the former Farquhar dispensed with one of his; and we improvised the latter with a strap for one and some twine for the other. My outfit, such as it was, was thus completed. I left most of my kit in the kindly charge of my Irish captain, and strapping my kaross and waterproof cloak behind my saddle and slinging a water-bottle and a haversack with two days' rations over my shoulders, I mounted my Rosinante. The get-up was so weird that one of the officers who had helped me patch it up insisted upon taking a photo-

graph of me on my mount, and I left the camp with the heartiest laughter ringing in my ears.

Farquhar's Argentine and my sorrel Boer pony bore us safely across the Vet, and the first of the six miles to Smaldeel passed without incident. The country was hilly near the river, and we forbore to press our steeds. Then we struck the level veldt and, mindful of the advantage of a good start, sought to urge our steeds onward at a more lively pace. But that proved impossible. Neither whip nor spur could prevail upon our poor beasts to move beyond the slowest of walks. Three miles at a snail's pace were enough to convince us that we should never catch up with headquarters with such transport. To make any sort of a change, however, threatened to be a serious difficulty, if not an impossibility; for we were following in the wake of thirty thousand mounted men, and the corpses, along the dusty roadside, of the animals that had succumbed to the strain put upon them warned us that we should be lucky indeed if we found any serviceable horseflesh left behind. Luck and our wits were our only resources. Push on we must; and we made the best of our way over the veldt towards Smaldeel, along a dusty road badly cut up by the multitude of convoys preceding us. Our horses faltered more and more with each lengthening step, and threatened to drop dead at any moment; but finally those six miles were

covered. We had left Vet river camp at 8:30; it was nearly noon of a very hot day when we reached Smaldeel, a little collection of poor houses and hovels clustered around the railway station.

We had already decided that our only chance to get on lay in finding some Cape cart and commandeering that; serviceable mounts were clearly out of the question. Our relief was great, therefore, when we caught sight of several carts, clumsy vehicles on two wheels, built on the principle of a hansom but much less carefully balanced. It still remained, however, to secure two horses to drag one. The outlook was discouraging. There were several ponies in sight, cropping painfully at the veldt grass or standing with drooped heads in some of the yards; but there never was a more dejected and hopeless-looking lot. But after a search we stumbled upon a corral of sore-backed creatures, some of them showing signs of not having lost all strength and spirit; and to us as we stood looking them over came a stout man who confessed to the name of Schwartz and proved to be very timid. These were Government horses, he apologetically explained, that had been placed in his charge to recover of their wounds, and under no account, his instructions were, was he to part with them. We informed Schwartz, however, that we were under orders to make all haste to the front with despatches, and that we must have two of the

horses and a set of harness. Schwartz, with many misgivings, finally gave in, and undertook to fit us out on our signing a receipt for the animals and promising to restore them next day. None of them looked as if they could survive, but we had to take that risk. We spent two hours in selecting two that would consent to go in harness without balking; then transferred our kit to the cart, made a hasty meal of bully beef and bad bread, supplied by the good-natured mother of ten dirty brats, and, discarding our two wrecks of saddle-horses, started on for Zand river, twenty-four miles away, where inquiry led us to believe we should find headquarters.

We started on across the veldt at a fair pace, and soon began to pass supply wagons drawn by six, eight, and ten span of oxen and mules, which gave us some idea of the transport problem upon which Lord Kitchener was engaged. The bodies of horses and oxen which had fallen in their tracks grew more frequent as we toiled our well-nigh trackless way under the blazing sun, the boundless veldt all around us, dotted with innumerable ant-hills, rising often to a height of two feet, and relieved only occasionally by a few isolated kopjes. The veldt was all of the dreary khaki color, with only here and there patches of green as we drew near and passed a pool of stagnant water. The scene gave us a hint of the task England had before her in carrying on a war in an

almost arid country 7,000 miles away from her base of supplies.

Thirteen miles out of Smaldeel we came upon what was surely a prosperous farm before the war. There we replaced one of our horses with a little mare, which looked fit enough, though in foal. Farquhar had had to use signs in making our wishes known; the white people had abandoned the place, and the few blacks left behind spoke nothing but Dutch and Kaffir, in neither of which tongues was he proficient. However, this was war, and our appearance of being fully able to take what we wanted discouraged the Kaffirs from going too far in their attempts to misunderstand us. Weeks later, by one of those happy chances which war brings, Farquhar and I met again in Johannesburg, and the first question he asked was about the little mare who had served us so well.

The rest of that day's journey we made at a fair pace. Ant-hills grew more numerous and kopjes less so as the veldt flattened out into a boundless, sun-baked plain, with no trees and no shadows save our own. A few miles beyond the farm we passed a large convoy halted by the side of a pool. The animals had been outspanned, and scores of native drivers were busy in their own noisy, lazy fashion watering the animals. We stopped for a few moments to exchange greetings and surmises with the officer in charge of the few troops forming the convoy's guard.

and then resumed our journey. At Doorn river we found another wrecked bridge and overtook and passed another convoy streaming across the drift. The passage of this river, which was nothing but a creek, with a tiny stream of water meandering at the foot of the deep-cut channel between steep, rugged banks, we made without much difficulty, thanks to the lightness of our load. Proceeding along on the northern side, our surroundings repeated themselves monotonously: more dead animals, more ant-hills, and fewer and fewer kopjes. No wonder the Boers had skedaddled; there wasn't cover for even a hare. Presently the sun sank below the horizon, and the sky blazed out into the glorious colors which are such a revelation to dwellers in other climes. The after-glow faded, and soon we were jogging along under a brilliant moon and a sky studded with twinkling stars, among which Venus, sinking slowly into the west, reigned easily supreme, her splendor dimmed but little by the moon.

About an hour after sunset we gained the crest of a slight rise, and a wide circle of low-lying flame came into view. We thought it the camp-fires of the Zand River camp, and congratulated ourselves on approaching our journey's end; but a nearer view showed us that it was only the veldt grass burning. We drove on another mile before unmistakable camp-fires twinkled before us, on higher ground ahead,

which we rightly assumed to be beyond the river. We had now caught up with the largest convoy of the day, and were threading our way past innumerable wagons, heavily laden, slowly drawn along by long lines of patient oxen and straining mules, the negroes walking alongside or running up to the leaders or back again to stir up some unwilling worker, crying strange cries and dexterously plying twenty-foot whips. Troopers trotted by, carbine slung on shoulder and blanket rolled behind the saddle, and now and then an officer wrapped in his great-coat galloped past in the dust.

Virginia was the name of the little station this side of the Zand, now a bustling camp; and here we finally drew up a little after seven o'clock, checked by an impassable line of crowded wagons, with Tommies all around us preparing the evening meal about the camp-fires, chatting and joking gaily. Nothing ever seemed to disturb Tommy's equanimity in camp. He put up with all sorts of hardships with the same careless good-nature. It was a cheery sight to watch these dust-stained warriors peacefully cooking and tasting, bantering each other with good-natured chaff; and as we looked about us, and noted the ever-changing lights and shadows, as the fires flared up and sank down again, throwing the forms into clear relief and anon leaving them in gloom again, we too forgot our trials of the day. It didn't take us long to find

that the drift was blocked by the transport and that it would be hopeless to attempt to get across that night. Headquarters were only two miles beyond, however, we were told, and we felt confident of catching up in the morning.

Outspanning, we picketed our weary horses behind the cart, gave them feed, and then sought out a spot to lie upon. Up against the side of a shanty we found a pile of corncobs—mealies, as they call them in South Africa—and of these we made a clean and by no means uncomfortable couch. We then boiled some water over a neighboring fire, brewed some “tabloid tea,” and with that and some more bully beef that had come all the way from a Chicago packing-house, we made a good meal. At nine, we rolled up on our corncob couch, and, warm and snug in spite of the cold, we dropped asleep under the stars. I woke up about one, disturbed by a wandering pony which looked like one of ours. I knew we were lost if either of them wandered away into that mass of animals, and so jumped up to head him off. But he was a stranger. Our two were standing quietly where we had picketed them, sleeping that standing sleep of their kind. It was an encouraging sign—if they had been lying down I should have feared they were played out. But they had grazed bountifully on the veldt scrub, and were fit enough, though not to be too hard pressed. I turned in again, and next woke with the sun in my eyes, just above the horizon.

CHAPTER V.

THE FRONT AT LAST.

More tea and bully beef, with some biscuits, formed our breakfast next morning, and inspanning we were soon wending a very devious way among the still crowded wagons towards the drift. They had been crossing all night by the light of the moon until it set, but the line still stretched far back towards Doorn river. We made our way to the bank, and there seemed no nearer the other side, for there was no break in the line of wagons on the drift. But here my companion's despatches stood us in good stead again, and an obliging transport officer halted the line to give our cart a place. The way across was steep and difficult; it looked impassable for the heavier wagons; but we finally reached the other side, and so did they, by dint of much lashing and yelling. On the other side we found that the advance guard, after overcoming a rather stout resistance from the enemy the day before, had halted not two but seven miles further on and had resumed their march at dawn. There was nothing for it but to peg along; and this we did, stopping every few hours by a wayside well and waiting our turn at the water with the hurrying soldiers. We were soon fairly up with the rear guard.

and troops were all about us. Our pace grew slower and slower as the hot day wore on, for we did not dare urge our ponies too fast, a circumstance that gave our journey its chief monotony. But towards the middle of the afternoon we passed the balloon, which had long been the most prominent feature of the landscape, and a little later caught sight of the farmhouse, nestling among some poplars, where Lord Roberts and his staff had pitched camp for the night.

Half an hour later we had reached our journey's end. The flower of England's army was all about us, and there, unostentatiously drawn up behind the red-walled farmhouse was "Bobs's" wagon with his office tent pitched against it. Two armed Sikhs stood immovable at the entrance. Within, we learned that he and Kitchener were deep in counsel. Staff officers were everywhere, copying despatches, coming or going with reports or orders, or washing away the stains of the day's march; horses were picketed in groups and long lines here and there, while troopers groomed and fed them, and other Tommies pitched tents or busied themselves at fires brewing the four o'clock tea. The tents and bivouacs of the officers crowded the extensive farmyard, but the troops were not allowed to pitch theirs, as the army was to move again at dawn, the commander-in-chief being resolved to waste no time, but to keep the enemy moving back till Kroon-

stad, then the capital, and now but a day's march away, was in his hands.

After outspanning and watering our tired ponies, my companion and I separated, he to deliver his despatches, and I to search for Lord Stanley, the censor. I found him stripped to the waist, enjoying the luxury of a bath in a portable tub. He greeted me most cordially, and sympathized with my troubles at Bloemfontein, which he said I might have been spared. In fact, nobody could have been more courteous or more helpful than Lord Stanley was to me. Later in the evening I had the official authority to go where I pleased with the army. Returning from his tent I caught sight of Lord Roberts himself, standing near his headquarters. The familiar figure was alert and erect as ever, and in his eyes was the look which was so true an index of all he had done and all he yet would do. It was equally easy to understand how he could lead such an army to splendid achievements from which under him there could be no turning back, and why every Tommy in the ranks spoke of him affectionately as "The Little Man" and adored him.

I walked by, to take a cup of tea with a genial officer of his staff, who in the true comradeship of the field offered me the hospitality of his tent: and later I dined with the Earl of Kerry, A. D. C., at his mess, where I also fared most enjoyably and in the best of company. Afterwards Lord Kerry and I strolled over

to the camp of the Coldstreams, where I renewed acquaintance with Captain Marker, who had been a fellow-passenger on the "Scot." Leaving him struggling to get supper for his men, whose supplies had not yet come up, we strolled back towards headquarters, and shortly afterwards separated for the night. At my own bivouac I found my colleague, Barnes of the *Daily Mail*, with whom I discussed my prospective journey back to Bloemfontein, and thence to Kimberley and Fourteen Streams, to join General Hunter. Soon Farquhar joined us with the good news that he had got his commission under General Pole-Carew, a fact which I regretted only because it would deprive me of his company back. Then we turned in for another night on the veldt.

At dawn we were up again, and I took a position of vantage whence to see the army move on. The advance started as soon as it was light. Half an hour later the whole force was on the march, moving off in serried ranks towards Kroonstad, which Lord Roberts entered without opposition that afternoon. There was no glitter of accoutrements and no brilliancy of uniform in that khaki-clad array, but the sight was none the less inspiring, well calculated to convince the Boer of his folly in challenging Britannia to gird on her sword and go forth to war. By seven o'clock regiment after regiment was streaming by, and clouds of dust obscured the view ahead and far out on either

flank. The balloon division had started before all, and the huge, yellowish bulk of that monster was already far in the lead. Along the side of the line of march the transport cattle were being inspanned and started off, and to the rear as far back as the eye could reach troops eager to catch up were streaming on. And meanwhile "Bobs" himself, attended by Lord Kitchener and the rest of the staff, had quietly mounted, and with a brief word or two the little headquarters cavalcade had trotted off, leaving the supply wagons to bring up the rear. I watched for a while the work of obliterating all signs of the camp, and then, as time was precious, inspanned my ponies and started back to retrace alone my track to Bloemfontein. My rations had given out, but a fellow correspondent provided me with what I needed, and it only remained for me to pick up a black boy somewhere along the route to be fully equipped.

Going back, I made better time at first. At Ventersburg road I stopped to make inquiries about getting a servant, and had the good fortune to find the railway inspector looking for just such a chance to get to Vet river, my own objective, where I could catch the train for Bloemfontein. The inspector, a long-transplanted Scotchman who, though taciturn, proved of great assistance, got his blanket and water-bottle, and, jumping into the cart beside me, we started on again.

Reaching Zand river, my camping-place of two nights before, after a stage marked only by increasing signs of distress from one of the ponies, we outspanned for lunch and a two hours' rest. The pony in question seemed nearly dead beat, and I began to fear our further progress would be blocked again for lack of animals. But after drinking three buckets of water he consented to eat some mealies, and shortly before five o'clock we felt justified in starting on again with him. The little mare, meanwhile, had proved herself to be made of excellent stuff.

We pushed on for a ganger's cottage along the railway, some six miles beyond Zand river, where dwelt a friend of my companion's. My good fortune in securing him for a fellow-traveller was now demonstrated, for he was able to promise a swifter mode of conveyance which should enable us to get at least as far as Smaldeel that night. It was evident that my weak pony would not be good for much more. Only by incessant lushing could we get him to move faster than a walk, and wielding the whip took all the attention of one of us, while the other managed the reins. I put the beast down as good for just about the six miles we must cover, if we did not want to be stranded on the desolate veldt. If we could cover that, however, we should be all right, promised my inspector. At the cottage, he said, we could shift to a railway hand-car, here called a trolley, and on that, as it was

a down grade nearly all the way to Smaldeel, we could make good progress the rest of the way.

Two miles out from Zand river night fell. Fortunately we still had the moon, and thus could see our way. But that last four miles in the Cape cart proved, none the less, exciting enough. The road across the veldt, such as it was, had been rendered so heavy by the passing of the miles of transport wagons that we had to keep to the sides. That took us among the ant-hills. The diminutive heaps we meet with at home are nothing to worry about; but these substantial structures erected by the African white ant are amply solid and high enough to upset a Cape cart. The moon furnished barely enough light to enable us to see these formidable obstructions just before we were on them. At a walk we might have avoided them easily enough. But at that pace our ponies could not have made two miles an hour, and so walking was out of the question. We decided that we must risk an upset in order to reach our destination in time, and that the ponies must be forced into a run even though they might drop dead before their task was over. So I gathered up the reins, and my companion, leaning out over the dashboard, laid on with the whip. We succeeded in infusing new life into the animals, and in a few moments we were bowling along at what was, in comparison with the other, a rattling pace. It took all my attention to avoid the

ant-hills. Many of them we did not see (they are the same color as the veldt itself) until they loomed up between the ponies' heads, and I had to keep them steady to let the mounds pass between the wheels. Once, in spite of all care, we did hit one, and nearly went over. Another time half the cart, as it seemed, disappeared into a yawning ant-bear hole, and again we were nearly gone. But finally the cottage appeared, a dark shadow ahead, and, to make a long story short, we reached it safely. The ponies were left in good hands, and after a cup of hot coffee, provided by the ganger's family, the trolley was fitted to the track, and, shifting our kit to it, we settled ourselves for the last stage of our journey. The trolley was simply a small flat truck. The motive power was furnished by two niggers, who ran behind and pushed, imitating as they did so the puffing sound of an engine. After practice, my inspector told me, they could push such a load up grade at the rate of five miles an hour. Of the twenty miles to Smaldeel that lay before us, however, all but six were down grade, along which the trolley would go by its own momentum with no other effort necessary than to control the brakes.

It was seven o'clock when four of us took our seats on this rolling platform, our legs hanging over, for one of the strangest rides I ever took. The two black boys started the thing going. They ran along behind

for a few minutes and then took a flying leap aboard, and we went rushing along at a good twenty miles an hour. At first it was exhilarating enough, after our previous slow progress in the Cape cart: but after a while, as clumps of bushes rushed by in the dark and we passed over the culverts with a roar, I began to wonder whether the brakes would hold, whether the gangers had not overlooked some rails misplaced by the Boers, and how many pieces there would be to pick up if we jumped the track. None of these thoughts disturbed my companions, however: they had been "working on the railway" for years, and midnight rushes of this description were everyday incidents to them. They sat carelessly in their places and unconcernedly swapped yarns about trivial incidents of the war.

Nothing happened during the first thirteen miles, which we did in less than an hour. Then we drew up at another section station, paused for another cup of coffee, changed trolleys, and went on with a new brace of boys and another section foreman on the box seat in place of the one who had started with us. We now struck the up-grade stretch, and I curled up and went to sleep, soothed by the puffing and panting of our human engines, whom I drowsily resolved to present with two bob apiece after they had got us up. I woke up an hour later to find our car drawn up at another cottage and another transfer of trolleys and crew go-

ing on. The last two boys had disappeared in the darkness, thus losing the two bob, a fact which I sincerely regretted.

It was now eight miles down grade to Smaldeel, I was told, as we shoved off. The first few miles went by smoothly enough, but then what I had inwardly expected all along happened. We jumped a switch, and in a twinkling I was gazing upon my companions sprawling on the ground about the car, which had given a few clumsy jumps over the ties and then come to a stop with a heavy list to starboard. I listened for moans, but heard welcome laughter instead; and in a moment everybody picked himself up, and we all reported no injuries. We got the car back on the rails, and amid the chuckles of the negroes resumed our descent. Shortly afterwards we reached Smaldeel in safety, and building a fire in the grate in the woman's waiting-room at the station, and partaking of a cold supper, the inspector and I disposed ourselves for the night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VAST LAND OF THE BOERS.

Next morning, after some chafing delay, we proceeded for Vet river by another trolley. There were several broken culverts along our route, but an inexhaustible supply of trolleys and trolley experts, and we finally whirled down to the bank of the Vet river at about eleven o'clock of that Sunday morning. The camp there was a familiar sight, and there was the railway, clear to Bloemfontein and Kimberley. I was soon among friends again, and was told that a train would leave at noon. I also found a Captain Creagh, of the King's Royal Rifles, the same Irish regiment of my friend Captain Harrison, who was also going down to Bloemfontein, and we foregathered.

But we were doomed to disappointment again. The troops, after working night and day since Wednesday, had just completed the deviation across the river, and every engine in the place was needed to get the stalled supply-trains across. The delay lengthened, and it was midnight before we finally got off. But those hospitable Irish officers took the best of care of me, and my only grief was that I should probably miss the next morning's train to Kimberley. And I did.

That last stage of my journey back to Bloemfontein

I passed with Captain Creagh in an open coal-truck. But the night was the most comfortable of all, notwithstanding, for we rigged up an effective shelter with a huge tarpaulin, and slept like tops till well after sunrise, when we found ourselves once more back in Steyn's ancient capital.

After such a journey as that which I had just completed, one begins to comprehend something of the characteristics of the mighty continent of Africa. Looking back upon the closer acquaintance which my later experiences gave, I find that the impression made by the surroundings in which the British nation found its latest opportunity to prove the stuff it is made of is still a very strong one. No one with eyes to see can look out upon a South African landscape without being sensible of that feeling of awe which great antiquity always inspires. The mystery and the indefinable charm of vastness and of age are in that ancient land made manifest on a mighty scale unknown in more familiar spots of the earth, where man and nature are closer allies and friends. A land where the light of day is the fiercest and the dark of night the blackest one can know anywhere, nature in those great spaces, which are still almost all her own, seems as nowhere else to be governing her kingdom on lines too great for man to trace. Looking forth from some solitary eminence, man feels a puny atom indeed when he realizes that that horizon which he

sees so clearly is three score miles away. The veldt of the great South African plateau looks as ancient as the sea. The great black rocks that crop out here and there seem to lie just where they fell ages back, after that mighty convulsion which heaved up Africa out of the sea; and the softly rounded outlines of the kopjes and the mountain ranges are the outlines of the everlasting hills. Earth and sky seem full of ancient mysteries, as Rider Haggard must have felt when he chose those surroundings for so many of his weird tales of imagination. The whole atmosphere of Africa suggests irresistibly the mysterious and the unknowable.

To this effect the wonderful clearness of the air lends a large share. To see such an extent of country spread out before one like an open palm; to note the main features of earth and sky repeating themselves endlessly and changelessly, is to gain a first impression which one can never forget, though he find it far beyond him to define. To get such a range of vision in our own land we should have to go far up from the earth in a balloon, and then the effect would not be the same, for from a balloon we should simply see a landscape in miniature; a field become the corner of a garden, a city shrunk to the proportions of a doll-house. In South Africa cities are few and far apart: up in a balloon there nothing would shrink—one would simply see more vastness.

For it is the vastness of an open plain, the hugeness of black volcanic rocks as large as mountains, that are characteristic of South Africa. The few cities—Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Kimberly, Johannesburg—and the little rural towns and villages scattered far apart, are all alike hopelessly dwarfed by the vastness of the silent veldt around them, out of which you come upon them as upon a ship in mid-ocean, and by which you are swallowed up again when you leave them behind. One is haunted in South Africa with the idea that man and all his works are insignificant amid nature's heights and breadths and mighty distances. The equatorial sun is sovereign lord of all; nature is here the giantess unshackled by any Lilliputian bonds. And man, constrained to adapt himself to her huge scale, finds that a thousand-acre lot must be his barnyard, wherein the strutting fowls are grown to stately ostriches and the monstrous cattle wear horns that would shame a Texas steer.

Such is the land which the degenerate Boer declared to be too small to contain himself and so much as one Englishman besides, when he formed those petty plans of his to drive the English into the sea; and yet in all its length and breadth Oom Paul, when England aroused herself at last, could find no spot remote enough to hide in—no cover into which, sooner or later, Tommy Atkins would not find his way.

Contributing also to the sense of vastness which overwhelms one in South Africa is the lack of tree or shrub in so much of the boundless veldt. Whatever it may be in summer, in the rainless winter season it wears the dull yellowish-brown hue of khaki; and one may travel over it for days without seeing a single green thing. Alone on such a sea, one feels alone indeed. And that feeling takes possession of one even with an army for company, whether on the march, steadily and silently pushing onward, or at rest in camp, with tents and camp-fires gleaming, artillery and cavalry horses picketed all around, and cattle grazing far out on every side.

Geologically as well as historically, Africa is one of the oldest continents; and the venerable appearance of its stocks and stones impresses one as profoundly as the vastness of its empty spaces. In the seamed, bronzed face of Table Mountain, that majestic sentinel of the Cape of Good Hope, one not only sees the traces of the passage of unnumbered ages, but the imagination is carried back still further into the remotest past in the effort to guess how early it was in the world's morning that the peak of that huge rock was razed off. And everywhere from the Cape northwards as far as Pretoria, which was the limit of the author's journeyings, one notes the signs of age. The configuration of the plains of the great plateau, which ranges from the Great Karroo on the

south to the high veldt of what was but lately the Transvaal, is such as one imagines that of the bottom of the sea to be; and the kopjes rising everywhere out of the undulating veldt, and the higher hills and mountains marking the course of the Vaal river, tracing the northern boundary of Basutoland, and sheltering the golden Witwatersrand around Johannesburg, all alike have the softly-rounded outlines which the forces of nature must have ages of undisturbed labor to fashion.

It was natural enough that the Boers, who had lived long enough in South Africa to become perfectly familiar with the features of the country, should find it easy at first to resist with signal success the advance of a British army as large as Buller's, operating in a country as new to them as it was well known to Cronje and Botha and De Wet. The wildernesses of the veldt are traversed by only a few lines of single track, narrow gauge railway. The main line northward from Cape Town remains a single line until it reaches De Aar Junction, over 400 miles away. There it branches, the main line continuing northward along the western border of the Free State and the Transvaal to Kimberly and Mafeking, the latter town being 850 miles from Cape Town; while the branch goes southeastward to Naanwpoort Junction, and thence northward, with a slight trend eastward, to Bloemfontein, Johannes-

burg, and Pretoria, the last some 900 miles northward from the sea. This main line, the comparatively short line running west and southwest from Johannesburg to Klerksdorp through Kruegersdorp and Potchefstroom (the old Boer capital), and the line from Johannesburg eastward to Portuguese East Africa, are the only roads affording anything but bullock and horse transport across the country of the Boers. A glance at any map of South Africa will show what vast tracts of territory remained to be traversed by the ancient methods of stage-coach, bullock wagon, and Cape cart.

Lord Roberts naturally made the railway line his main line of communication. But columns had to be sent off east and west to overrun the whole country, and these columns had to depend for the transport of the great stores of food, ammunition, and the thousand and one things that go to make up the *impedimenta* of a great army in the field upon bullocks, mules, and horses, which at best can make but twenty or thirty miles a day. It was in doing the endless trekking which the British operations under such circumstances entailed that Tommy Atkins and his officers learned to curse South Africa during those moments when the strain seemed almost too much for flesh and blood to bear. Nobody complained when the fight was on; when there were Boer trenches to be carried or a target to be hit. But when the enemy took to

his heels, and, marching with that extraordinary mobility of his, kept always a day ahead of his pursuers; when the troops had often to follow along a doubtful trail over vast plains which seemed interminable, around kopjes from some snug eyrie of which the baggage train might at any moment be threatened by Boers who could always get away before they could be come up with; through defiles and across drifts that always proved too much for some of the patient animals; under a blazing sun by day and in bitter cold by night; with water scarce and bad, and firewood sometimes scarcer still: it was under circumstances such as these that Tommy drank deep of that drudgery and monotony and apparent impotence that compose the most galling bitterness of war. There was little faltering when the "kerchunk, kerchunk" of Mausers was making music in the soul; when the deep bass of the field-guns was waking the echoes of the hills; when the enemy had been at last located in front of right or left or centre. It was the endless trekking, trekking, trekking; halting wearily in the dark and starting off again before dawn, that wore out stout hearts of man and beast. One reached the summit of one ridge strong in the hope that the goal must be in sight from there, only to find another and still other ridges beyond which in their turn must be traversed. The veldt looks bare and level up to the very skyline, sixty miles away; but in real-

ity it is a succession of hills and valleys that lie between; and in its slow and toilsome progress forward the long line of march was hidden from the distant observer as often as it was revealed. And the roads! They are just as hoofs and wheels have made them: hard and smooth only where the soil is of a character to resist wear and tear; and where it is soft and sandy, heavy as a ploughed field. During all their years of occupancy of the land the Boers have never expended an hour of labor in the improvement of the roads. They have contented themselves with devising carts and wagons of exceptional strength to withstand the strains that they will not labor to lessen, and in developing a race of draught animals of unusual hardiness. The idea of making an ally of nature occurs to them but seldom, and is acted upon only by the few who deserve to be called enterprising.

The lack of water during the long dry season of winter, when nearly all the streams run dry, is another characteristic of South Africa which may be traced to the indolence of the Boer. We saw a typical illustration of this on the march of General Hunter's division from Vryburg northward and eastward into the Transvaal to Lichtenburg. During eight days of trekking the troops depended for water upon a few tanks while near the railway, and thereafter upon brackish pools, sometimes twenty feet below the surface, known in the Dutch jargon as pans,

and an occasional small lake where a farmer of the rarer type had built a dam across a stream and thus held the water prisoner, truly in durance vile. For days one marched twenty miles at a stretch without encountering even a brackish pool; and when it was found the water was too often poisoned with the germs of typhoid. Under such circumstances it was natural that the veldt, which is almost perfectly level in that region, should be little more than a parched desert, without a tree or even a shrub as far as the eye could reach to relieve the overpowering monotony of vast tracts. I well remember the joy of our small advance party one blazing noonday when we caught sight of a clump of half a dozen green-leaved willows beside a well wherein there still remained a few feet of stagnant water. Our meal under that shade was the pleasantest we had tasted in a week. But even that simple solace was denied to the main force following us, for there was not room under that green awning for more than half a dozen at a time.

And yet those very trees were a rebuke to Boer indolence. They drew their sustenance from an inexhaustible supply of water that only wanted a little labor to bring it up to the surface, within reach of the poorest thirsty man or beast. Men who know that arid country well have told me that almost everywhere, at a depth of twenty or thirty feet, water

is abundant. A sunken shaft and a windmill are the simple arts needed to make such a desert blossom like the rose. And so it doubtless will be when British law and order invite the pastorally inclined to make their homes in a land which offers a far greater reward to the industrious than many a tract now flourishing like the green bay tree under other suns and stars.

Most of the towns and hamlets and isolated farms scattered over South Africa reveal the same characteristics. A very few (more's the pity!), generously adorned with close-set trees, blooming with gardens, alive with sleek cattle and healthy fowls, show what man can do if he will. All about the country are scattered Kaffir kraals, set down amid rich mealie fields and melon patches, each hut of which is a model of cleanliness and prospering thrift. The skins of the occupants are black, and their faces are not beautiful according to our Caucasian standards; but many of them have the bodies and limbs of Apollos and Venuses, and they are cleaner under their gaudy blankets and furs even than are their floors. Other abodes of the Boer, by far the greater number—farms with their rude hovels built of sun-baked clay, with ragged thatch of rotting straw; villages of galvanized-iron shanties or squat, one-storied buildings of wood, with broken windows and decaying stoep—show what the white man of the country is generally

content with. The Boer has built many pretentious town halls and government buildings of enduring stone; but he is generally satisfied to dwell himself in what his cleanly and virile forbears of France and Holland would deem no better than a pig-sty.

But the Boer is not what he once was. He has lived too long in an unnatural isolation to preserve his ancient virtues; and South Africa, "the grave of reputations," has sucked from him most of his old virility and is dragging down a once respectable race to slow and sure decay.

CHAPTER VII.

FITTING OUT FOR THE FRONT.

The roundabout railway journey I had to take to reach Kimberley from Bloemfontein would have been much more dreary than it was in any but an unfamiliar country, where there was much that was new and strange to claim the attention. We had to go all the way back to De Aar Junction before getting the train for the north, and there being no attempt to make close connections, I had to spend four dreary midnight hours on a cold and cheerless station platform that I never want to see again, by night or by day. The train from the Cape finally came in, however, and I was soon fast asleep in a fairly comfortable berth which I had the good luck to find unoccupied.

There were fewer delays beyond De Aar, that part of the Colony having by this time been purged of the Boers; and on the evening of that day I reached Kimberley. The town was chiefly conspicuous at first sight for the huge piles of gray earth on its outskirts, that mark the entrances to the diamond mines, and for the galvanized-iron shanties that constitute the greater number of its buildings.

I was now within easy distance of Fourteen

Streams; it only remained to procure the outfit wherewith to accompany the army. We correspondents had to provide our own transport, and generally "find ourselves" in everything save army rations and army forage, for which we were entitled to draw upon the Army Service Corps at the rate of four shillings a day for each man's ration and five shillings for a day's supply of forage for our animals.

The next morning I found an honest auctioneer who contracted to furnish a Cape cart, three ponies, harness, and body servant complete. We wasted no time in coming to terms, and before sunset the outfit was assembled on the edge of the public square ready for my approval. Everything was satisfactory except two of the ponies and the servant. The former I had to send back for exchange the next day; but as substitutes I secured two excellent beasts, one of which, Wolf, survived all our experiences, and faithfully earned the reward which on parting with him I stipulated he should receive: three months of absolute rest and generous feeding. To obtain a reliable black boy proved a more difficult task. The one selected by the auctioneer was drunk when I arrived, and was at once dismissed. I looked over the dozen or so who had gathered about to see the departure, and found none of them prepossessing. There was one, however, whose appearance promised sobriety at least; but he flinched when I explained to

him that he would have to go with the army, and he also stipulated that his weekly wage should be sent back to his wife at Kimberley. On that I let him go. Finally, among the others who were eagerly offering their services and protesting that they were eager to face any danger, my eye fell upon a Cape boy of shabby appearance, but with a steadiness in his eye that I liked; and I beckoned him out of the crowd. His name was Lewis. He too was married, he said, but was willing to receive his wages in person. The auctioneer vouched for his good character; and satisfied that he would do, I engaged him on the spot, on the condition that he bring my outfit safely to Warrenton within good time. This he did, and during all our subsequent wanderings proved a good and faithful servant.

My saddle-horse was of the polo-pony breed, small, wiry, and sound, save as to his knees. He later developed an incorrigible tendency to fall down at regular and brief intervals, and a few weeks later I seized an opportunity to trade him off for a less dapper but much more sober and reliable animal.

The road between Kimberley and Warrenton, the town on the south bank of the Vaal, opposite Fourteen Streams, was very heavy, I learned; so I decided to send my cart and horses on ahead light, while I proceeded myself by rail, carrying the heavier portion of my kit with me. So I started Lewis off that

afternoon, and next morning, Friday, the 18th of May, left myself by train. Four hours later I reached the little hamlet, and established myself at the Warren Hotel, a humble roadside inn set among a few poplars, in a neighborhood chiefly noted, I was told, for snakes.

The Warren Hotel was popular with the officers in General Hunter's camp across the river, where the fare was strictly regulated by the resources of the army supply department, and I spent twenty-four hours there in pleasant company waiting for my transport. I had left the raw type of officer behind me: General Hunter preferred to be served by men of worth, and the subalterns whom I sat down with at the Warren Hotel were all the best of fellows.

Lewis turned up early the next morning, driving four ponies instead of the two I had turned over to him at Kimberley, and with a tale of woe to tell in answer to my inquiries as to why he was late. The original team had given out, he explained, a short way from Kimberley—they were no good, anyhow—and he had put back to obtain two more. These had been temporarily supplied by the auctioneer, the others to be returned when I was safely across the Vaal. The arrangement seemed the best that could be made, so I, perforce, approved it.

A few hours later I rode to the river, and crossed over to where General Hunter's tents were gleaming.

The Vaal is one of the few South African rivers that does not dry up in winter. I found the current strong there at Fourteen Streams, with three feet of water on the drift and a stony bottom that made it no easy matter to get across dry-shod. My pony took it gallantly, however, worked his way forward among the other animals in the stream of traffic moving across, and in five minutes we were safely past the wagons struggling through, and found ourselves on the northern bank. I made my way to the press censor, was introduced by him to General Hunter, and after answering the searching but straightforward questions he put to me, was duly granted authority to attach myself to his force.

Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Hunter, when I was presented to him that day by Major Fasson, his Brigade-Major, was seated at a small table in the recesses of a commodious tent pitched in the centre of his camp, which occupied an extensive area on the high ground rising from the north bank of the Vaal river. As we halted at the entrance to his headquarters, the General looked up from the mass of papers over which he had been bending, and fixed me with a keen glance, preliminary to questioning me as to my fitness for the duties to which I had been assigned. I have seldom seen a more handsome man than he, or one more generously endowed with those physical characteristics which go

to make up one's *beau idéal* of the successful soldier and commander. Tall, and of splendid physique, strength of character was stamped on every feature of his striking face. It was a face that would attract attention anywhere, but it was most particularly in the searching glance of his clear, brown eye that one knew him for a man long trained in the habit of command. He had but to ask a question to compel the frank and upright answer. But once satisfied that a man, whoever he was, was what he professed to be, he thereafter, as I can testify from my own experience, treated him with all frankness and courtesy, and left no room for doubt that under all circumstances he would meet with the consideration due from man to man. One had only to do his duty and bear himself manfully, and he would have no cause to complain of General Hunter. That much was stamped upon his face; and all his actions were in keeping with the promise there written. But with all that, nothing ever betrayed him into loss of self-control. He knew well how to keep his counsel; and although throughout my subsequent service with him he never failed to give me full information on all subjects concerning which it was proper for the press to be instructed, he just as frankly refused to discuss matters which the proper conduct of the campaign required should not for the present be known. And whether his answer was consent or refusal, one always

left him satisfied that it was right. Such censorship as he exercised over our despatches was eminently fair, and there were no complaints from any of the war correspondents attached to his forces. General Hunter and his courteous Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Murray, gave me, for one, every cause to appreciate as a privilege of the highest the opportunity to witness those operations of the Tenth Division.

Like most of the higher officers who have won distinction in South Africa, General Hunter had seen service in Egypt, where he had first displayed the high qualities which later enabled him to render such able assistance to General White during the defence of Ladysmith. Some time before I joined him at Fourteen Streams, he had been intrusted by Lord Roberts with the relief of Mafeking. Of how he sent Colonel Mahon forward to the brilliant achievement of that plan England at least does not need to be reminded.

After foregathering with two other correspondents whom I found in General Hunter's camp, I recrossed the river to bring up my establishment. That afternoon my cart, now heavily laden with my mess supplies and other stores, was got safely across, and before sunset my little bivouac was pitched near that of my fellow correspondents, and I settled down to life at the front.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RELIEF OF VRYBURG.

We remained in camp at Fourteen Streams for only two days more, awaiting news of the fate of Colonel Mahon's expedition for the relief of Mafeking. On Sunday I sent back to Kimberley my two unserviceable horses. On Monday the press censor gave us the glad news that Baden-Powell had been successfully relieved, a day ahead of the time set by Lord Roberts. The way was now cleared for General Hunter's advance northward and eastward into the Transvaal, to be ready, if necessary, to co-operate with Lord Roberts's main column in overcoming any Boer resistance to the advance on Johannesburg and Pretoria. The preparations for striking camp were at once begun, and on Tuesday we correspondents obtained permission to start on in advance of headquarters, which were to move in a day or two for Vryburg. That morning we started on our lonely trek across the veldt, cheered by the expectation of soon seeing some fighting and of assisting in the taking of Pretoria.

Our four hours' horseback ride that day to Bordersiding was through a country much more interesting

than the level and not too fertile tracts of the Free State that we had previously traversed. Seen across the Vaal river from Warrenton, Griqualand looked for all the world like the richest woodland; and traveling through it we found that appearance to be due to closely set clumps of thornbushes, which often grew high enough to be called trees. Further down country nothing rose higher above the veldt than the omnipresent ant-hill, save an occasional clump of poplars marking some pool of water. Most noticeable of all that we now saw about us was the green in the landscape. It was a cheering change, for the all-pervading khaki of the Free State and northern Cape Colony wearied the eye and the soul. In Griqualand one realized what results might be obtained if a colony of enterprising farmers would turn to, dig down the necessary twenty feet to the water which exists at that depth all over, or rather all under, that land, and freshen up the soil, which is as rich as any in most parts of the world, and richer far than tracts in Australia and in some parts of America now fertile were originally. But we speedily found that the Boer was content if he wrested a bare living out of the soil (and a bare living for him was bare indeed); his nearest neighbor was too far away to stir him into competition, and so a country with almost infinite resources and blessed with as fine a climate as there is anywhere, went begging for some nation of workers

to redeem it. That appeared to be also the situation in the neighboring parts of the Transvaal, for it was only an imaginary line a hundred yards from where we pitched our bivouac that evening that separated it from British territory. From the top of a kopje across the border, where Captain Robertson of the Commaught Rangers, in command of the small supply depot there, had built a most businesslike little fort, I looked out that afternoon over thousands of acres of the richest pasture-land, green with verdure ; and though one could see sixty miles in that clear atmosphere, a strong pair of field-glasses failed to reveal a sign of human habitation.

We started on from Border siding the next morning, the 23rd, and after a halt of four hours at Phokwani, to rest our horses, we left the line of the railway and started off across country towards Taung. Our progress that afternoon was retarded by one of our ponies giving out, and darkness found us on the veldt, miles away, apparently, from anywhere. Finally halting at about half-past six, we sought in vain for water for our horses, and in the end had to outspan and leave them thirsty until day should break. For ourselves we had enough in our water bottles, and made a good meal. Then we pitched our tent, and spent the night in entire comfort.

We were up at dawn to find visitors in the form of two grizzled Kaffirs and three ebony children, all

wrapped up in scanty karrosses and shivering in the morning chill, who had come down from a kraal which daylight revealed to us on rising ground half a mile away. The same distance to the west the gleam of running water, which had been hidden from us in the darkness, caught our eye, and we at once sent our boys off with the horses, which soon returned visibly refreshed. We managed to learn from our Kaffir friends that we were just beyond Banks Drift, on the right road to Taungs, and that the latter place was only a few miles away.

Meanwhile our visitors, whose numbers kept increasing until there were ten or twelve men and children about us, eagerly helped us to build our fire, the prospect of which had proved the chief magnet to draw them forth from their huts, and also drew water for us from the neighboring Harts. One cannot imagine a more picturesque group than these natives formed, in the wilderness where they were living just as they had done since the beginning, showing the traces of civilization only in their lack of weapons and in the cast-off white man's garments which some of them wore beneath their buckskin karrosses. The most interesting and oldest of the party we learned was the chief of the neighboring tribe and lord of the kraal on the hill. His name was Abarub, he told us, and we managed to hold quite a conversation with him with the aid of one of the

youngsters, who could speak a few words of English and acted as interpreter. Abarub was a most genial old chap, though dignified withal, and I took photographs of him and the rest, interestingly grouped, while Paxton made a sketch of him squatting on the ground and gazing toward his kraal. At first he refused to face the camera, of which he was plainly very much afraid; but Paxton's sketch pleased him immensely. We gave him presents of tobacco and jam-tins, which the youths in his train licked clean, and he acknowledged our beneficence with grave courtesy. We left them with mutual expressions of regret and pushed on towards Taungs. All about us were Kaffir huts—no white men appeared anywhere; indeed, we had not seen one since leaving Phokwani. The undulating veldt, studded with mimosa bushes, might almost never have been trodden by white men, so few traces had they left behind as they passed by with their occasional bullock teams. The country was fertile enough, however, as the mealie fields and melon patches of the Kaffir testified. Abarub's people were evidently prosperous.

We reached Taungs about noon. There we met Abarub's overlord, King Malala. He lunched with us in an officer's tent, and we all shook hands and exchanged greetings with most interesting ceremony. Shortly after we arrived, General Hunter's train steamed in from Fourteen Streams. Walker and I

boarded it and entered Vryburg with him, leaving our two companions to bring on our carts by road.

General Barton's brigade had reached this little town on the preceding Wednesday, to be enthusiastically greeted by most of the fifteen hundred inhabitants, who for seven long and weary months had been cut off from railway and practically all other communication with the rest of the world, and overrun with Boers. The traces of the enemy's presence were not difficult to see. They had stripped the town of about everything in the way of food and stock, and left behind filth and bad smells, in accordance with their simple and pastoral habits. It is easy to understand why a community should rejoice to be delivered from an invader who locks horses up in dwelling-houses and leaves them there to die and rot. That was the discovery made in this neighborhood by one of General Barton's officers. The labor of cleaning up Cape Colony after the Boers should have been driven out of it was evidently going to be one that Hercules himself would not have smiled at.

And Vryburg was entitled to better treatment. It was a pleasant enough little place. Most of its one-story, rectangular houses were built along one broad street, close upon two miles long, and lined for most of the way with lofty willows and poplars. We saw no gardens, but there were many open lots on which the veldt grass and scrub grew luxuriantly. Above

all, O'Reilly's Spruit and innumerable wells furnished an ample supply of the best water, which even the Boers had not been able to contaminate.

The townspeople were English and Dutch, mixed in fairly equal proportions. It had been somewhat of a rebel stronghold, but most of the earnest Boer sympathizers had by this time cleared out. One remained, however, to run the Vryburg hotel, seeing his chance to make much money out of the British, and willing to take the risk of being sent to Kimberley to be tried for treason. He waited upon us at meals, dressed in Boer fashion—dirty trousers and waistcoat, dirty shirt minus a collar, and a scraggy beard. His food was good, however, and appetizing if one did not penetrate into the fastnesses of the grimy kitchen, presided over by one lone Kaffir cook. How she and he together managed to provide three meals a day for forty hungry officers remained an unsolvable mystery to all of us.

General Barton's brigade had marched into Vryburg from Christiana after having done one hundred and twenty miles in seven marching days, and had made a dramatic entry in three columns amid the plaudits of the long-suffering inhabitants, who, though not so badly off as the people of Mafeking, had plenty of troubles of their own. At almost the same moment the armored train had steamed up to the station over the newly repaired line, to be greeted

with touching fervor as the first train seen for seven months. It was on the next day, the Queen's birthday, that General Hunter came in with his headquarters from Fourteen Streams. Her Majesty's birthday was celebrated in beautiful weather, with a parade of the troops, some five thousand in all, and emphatic expressions of loyalty were drawn from faithful Tommy Atkins by an extra issue of rum.

General Hunter and his officers settled down in Vryburg, entirely content with the success of his recent operations. Their chief result, of course, had been the relief of Mafeking, made possible by the decisive battle of Rooidam on May 5th, which split up the Boers who had prepared to oppose the advance of the flying column sent out by General Hunter, and left them with a force no larger than Colonel Mahon could deal with, as he did in the fight of May 13th, just beyond Koodoosrand. The repairing of the railway as far as Vryburg was also a satisfactory and important event: satisfactory, because the Boers had been boasting that the town would never see an English train again; and important, because the relief of Mafeking would not be complete until General Hunter's force had repaired the road up to the gates of Baden-Powell's stronghold. And so it was that not only had the gallant colonel been gazetted a Major-General, but General Barton, as well, had received the congratulations of the High Commissioner, Sir Alfred

Milner, on bringing Vryburg back under the flag on Her Majesty's birthday.

The military operations of the past few weeks had pretty well rid this part of the country of the enemy, and scouts and natives reported only a few scattered parties in the neighborhood. The main body that had been besieging Mafeking, and most of the rebels, had trekked east into the Transvaal. Whether they would oppose the invasion at the border or retire upon Johannesburg and Pretoria for a final stand, was at that time entirely problematical.

CHAPTER IX.

INVADING THE TRANSVAAL.

General Hunter's forces rested for a week at Vryburg, accumulating supplies and completing preparations for the march into the Transvaal which we soon learned was about to begin. Our General was to move across from the west, to clear and pacify the country eastward and northward up to Lord Roberts's line of march, then stretching northward from the Vaal towards Johannesburg. It was expected that the Boers recently driven from the neighborhood of Mafeking would be encountered somewhere; and General Hunter's orders were to scatter them if he could, and in any event to occupy the principal towns and villages of the western Transvaal and thus prevent their use as bases by the enemy. As it turned out, however, we met with no opposition. The Boers were already disorganized; they had already abandoned their early policy of resisting the columns now converging from all sides upon Pretoria, and had inaugurated the tactics of harassing the British flanks and rear which Christian de Wet was later to pursue with such brilliant success. Thus it was that from Vryburg to Kruegersdorp, the last town occupied by General Hunter before joining the forces to the eastward

of Johannesburg, not a shot was fired; and at Kruegersdorp itself, where the Boers made their only pretence of resistance, the British suffered but one casualty, a trooper of the Imperial Light Horse who fell a victim to a sniper's bullet. Several commandoes were roaming over the country we passed through, but they never waited to try conclusions with us; and General Hunter's march, like that of Lord Roberts from Bloemfontein up, was little more than a peaceful pilgrimage.

A few days before the movement from Vryburg began, Lieutenant-Colonel Murray, Chief of Staff, with the courtesy which he always extended to us of the press, showed us the itinerary decided upon. The force was to move by easy stages upon Lichtenburg, whence the further advance was to be governed by circumstances. The country lying between was bare and arid for the most part, with not enough water to support the whole force moving together, and so the division was split up into seven detachments, which were to follow one another a day's march apart.

The first stage of our journey was made by rail to Doornbult, then the farthest point on the line to Mafeking to which the Royal Engineers had carried their repairs. The Boers, retreating before each advancing column, expended much energy and dynamite in blowing up culverts and bridges, and in generally wrecking the railway and such rolling stock as

they could not take with them; but they succeeded in but slightly delaying the tightening of the great cordon closing in about doomed Pretoria. Doornbult was a typical South African railway siding. It boasted in the way of buildings two shanties rudely built of galvanized iron and a few mean Kaffir huts. A mile off the line was a farm which had been occupied by a prosperous English farmer. Natives had very thoroughly looted it, however, and we found the sole possessors to be half a dozen ostriches and a few of the original staff of native servants.

The scene that evening when we pitched our tent would have been desolate indeed but for the tents and wagons of the troops. The country thereabouts was little more than a level plain, out of which Leeuw Kop, two miles off to the east, rose as the only eminence. The veldt was parched and dry, and covered with an acrid dust which every breath of wind blew into every crevice of one's kit and clothes. Clumps of thorn-bushes and occasional stunted trees of the beech variety alone served to vary the monotony of the khaki-colored veldt, save where away to the west a small group of poplars and willows marked the presence of water, very muddy, but good enough for the animals. Of water fit for man there was none nearer than three miles, and in fact all along the first half of the route from Vryburg to Lichtenburg that precious fluid was extremely scarce. Such

as we found was by no means good, being generally stagnant and always muddy. Tommy Atkins when thirsty was not at all fastidious, however, and swallowed it eagerly, thus furnishing one simple enough explanation of the breaking out of typhoid fever wherever troops had camped for any length of time. The wiser of us ran no such risks, and boiled our water in the evening. After standing all night it was ice cold in the morning, and we were thus able to carry with us for the next day's supply water as pure as one could ask for. Everywhere underneath the surface in that country water was plentiful enough, as the vegetation, such as it was, testified; but since the white man first penetrated into the Dark Continent no one seemed to have found it worth while, except at spots very few and far between, to tap the underground supply. The way in which the Boer relied upon the Lord to satisfy his wants would have been touching if it did not bespeak such indolence and improvidence. He met with his reproof, however, for nothing could have been more plain than the fact that until he helped himself he would continue without any assistance from on high to dwell in the squalor and general wretchedness to which the average Boer, the stupid Kaffir, and the hopeless Hottentot seemed equally indifferent.

Tommy Atkins, however, went marching on through that land of unfulfilled promise with a never faltering

cheerfulness, forgetting all the hardships of the day as soon as his tent was pitched at evening and he heard the crackling of the fire which his comrade was building. His khaki uniform had long since lost every trace of neatness ; his shoes were more than worn, and he was grimy and generally unkempt from head to foot ; but he used to wake us up with a song as he went by our tent in the morning on his way for water or forage.

But then, Lord Roberts himself had no finer or fitter troops in his column than those stalwart troopers and fusiliers of General Hunter's division. The Royal Fusiliers, the Scots, Irish, and Welsh Fusiliers, the First Comaught Rangers, the Dublin Fusiliers, the crack Royal Horse Artillery, the Royal Field Artillery, and the Scottish companies of the dashing, reckless Imperial Yeomanry, were all represented in General Hunter's command, and formed his main force. On their colors were the names of Dundee, Elands-laagte, Nicholson's Nek, Ladysmith, Colenso — the last the spot where the troops in open order advanced for miles across an absolutely open plain under fire from an enemy almost impreguably intrenched on hills before them ; they helped to storm and carry Spion Kop, and were all through the terrible fourteen days and nights with Buller on the Tugela, before they were formed into the Tenth Division and placed under General Hunter's command after Ladysmith was relieved.

Time and again during that fierce and bloody Natal campaign they had driven the Boers out of positions that no one would have been so rash as to presume could be taken before these men showed the way into them and marked their path through the trenches with their dead. The ordeal had made men of them, many of whom were little more than boys when they had come across eight months before, and it was easy to see that it would go hard with the Boers if the latter tried to check them between there and Pretoria. Stalwart, bronzed veterans they were now, with a steady look in their eyes that was good to see if you were of their race and of their friends. Ten wars could not have tried them and proved them as this one had done, but they made no boasts. They simply walked straight and proudly, and held their heads up, looking every inch the men of mettle who could carve out a world-wide empire and then govern it wisely and well for the good of all.

Those days of early stress were past now, however, and in that camp at Doornbult all was peaceful. The scene as night fell that evening was typical of many another evening that followed. Half an hour after the sun went down there was only a band of deep yellow along the western horizon, shading off through delicate greens into the deepening azure of the rapidly darkening sky. Group by group the brighter and then the fainter stars came trooping out. Barely visi-

ble, the slender crescent of the new moon was sinking down the pathway marked by the sun's last ray. Under the stars a few camp fires began to gleam brightly. From the direction of the little railway platform, where a train from Vryburg had just drawn up, now and again a squad of soldiers, treading almost noiselessly over the soft veldt, slipped into the range of vision, passed by, and disappeared again into the gathering darkness. Sounds came faintly from the distance, where the last few boxes of supplies were being loaded into the wagons in readiness for the start at dawn, the softened cries of the Kaffirs mingling with the sounds of jostling boxes. From nearer at hand one heard the sizzling of a pot around which a group of black East Indian servants, with turbans on their heads, were muttering, cooking the evening meal for the officers' mess. Little by little these noises grew fewer, one heard a laugh or a snatch of song, and then the overwhelming stillness of the veldt settled down over all things. The wind, which had blown all day a refreshing breeze from the west, shifted into the east and took on the biting chill which would freeze the marrow in one's bones if one did not fortify himself with sweaters and greatcoats. Finally the sweetest sound of all, the bugle sounding "last post," rang through the camp, and as the last lingering notes died away the silence and the darkness became alike impenetrable.

CHAPTER X.

INCIDENTS OF THE MARCH.

We left Doornbult on the 31st of May with No. 5 detachment, and came along by easy stages, keeping between the two bodies of troops. By that arrangement we managed to travel most comfortably, and enjoyed to the full visits to Boer farms along and just off the line of march. Being by ourselves, we were able at many places to purchase eggs, milk, and such other delicacies as had become procurable over night, and had many interesting adventures. Throughout our march, after crossing the border at Maribogo Pan, we were face to face with some of the more distressing realities of war. Most of the farmhouses which we passed *en route* we found tenanted only by women and children; and they all, in Dutch and broken English, had woeful tales to tell of how their stock had been taken by the English or the Kaffirs, leaving them often with little or no meat themselves and no milk for the babies. General Hunter had strictly followed the policy of the English throughout this war, sternly prohibiting all looting by the troops, paying for all supplies taken for military purposes, and leaving behind enough for the inhabitants to get along with. The natives, however, finding their day

of reckoning at last at hand, were taking every opportunity to revenge themselves for years of Boer oppression. Many unprotected farms had been visited by marauding bands, and stock driven off when the places were not looted of everything. As is usually the case, the innocent had to bear their share of the suffering. In some cases Boer women had suffered the worst atrocities at the hands of the blacks. One household was saved in the nick of time a few days before we arrived by a squad from the advance guard of General Hunter's division. Four natives were preparing to torture the women when the corporal in charge of the squad appeared at the door and ordered them to surrender. The negroes submitted at once; but on getting outside the house and seeing that there were only five soldiers against them, they made a dash back again for their arms and opened fire. The result was disastrous for them, however, for the first volley from the corporal's guard disposed of them all. Another detachment of troops had rounded up a band of thirty or more looters, and had had to shoot several of them before getting the others under.

Some Boers furnished a little excitement for some of the detachments. As a rule, those living in the neighborhood through which the columns advanced came in and surrendered their arms. They had slipped back to their farms from commando, after seeing that the tide had turned against them, and,

sick of fighting, were glad enough to have done with it for the time being. These, unless something worse than fighting against England was known about them, were, in accordance with Lord Roberts's magnanimous policy, allowed to go free upon swearing to remain neutral and not to leave their farms. When the Yeomanry reached Barber's Pan, however, they heard that a band of the enemy had been in the neighborhood the day before, evidently with no intention of submitting; and a midnight raid was made on two suspected farmhouses. The men were too late, however, being in time only to see thirty or more Boers, mounted and armed, making off in the distance. They had presumably been visiting the women to obtain such food as the latter had been able to conceal.

At a farm not far from Biesjesvallei, near where the troops had had their brush with the Kaffirs, one of my companions (Mr. Paxton, the *London Sphere* artist) and myself got three prisoners of our own. We were a few miles in advance of the Fifth Detachment at the time, and had just outspanned for lunch under the shade of a small clump of trees. We two, with my servant Lewis, were standing beside a small well where we had overseen the watering of our horses, when Paxton called my attention to a group of horsemen approaching from the direction of Potchefstroom, which was well off the line of march, and

where we knew that none of our troops had been. Through our glasses we made them out to be three armed men, who at that distance seemed to be Kaf-firs. A moment later, however, we saw that they were Boers. One of them was holding aloft a white handkerchief, tied to the end of his rifle. Another, however, had his rifle slung across his knees; and, recalling former incidents of Boer treachery, we held ourselves very much on the alert. I concluded at once from the white flag that they had mistaken us, in our khaki and helmets, for British officers, and had come to surrender to us. To keep them from finding out their mistake was the vital point: we could not afford to have them learn that we were war correspondents, or the surrendering would in all probability have to be done by us. I alone was armed, and only with a revolver. So we decided to bluff it out. A glance back at our little cavalcade under the trees showed that it looked formidable enough, and I relied upon the passage of the detachment ahead of us the day before and upon the presence of the next one a few miles behind us to convince the Boers that we had plenty of force at our support. It all worked like a charm. As the Boers drew near we stepped boldly towards them. They came to within twenty paces of us, and then halted. The man with the white flag held up his other hand, and all three lifted their hats. I beckoned them forward, and when they

reached us, said to them that I supposed they had come to give up their arms. "Yes," they all replied with alacrity. We were delighted to hear it, and we gave them no chance to change their minds. So I directed Lewis, who, of course, spoke Dutch fluently, to tell them that they must give up their guns at once and then wait until headquarters came up, when we would turn them over to the commanding officer. They thereupon handed us their rifles and disgorged about one hundred rounds of ammunition, which we sent back to our carts. With their arms in our possession, we both breathed easier, and returned ourselves to the trees to eat our lunch and wait for the column to catch us up, leaving our three prizes lying on the veldt beside their ponies to await our pleasure.

We waited for an hour or so, and still the column did not come. We began to get restless, and so did the Boers. Finally, two of them climbed up on the wall of a ruined outhouse, scanned the country in our rear, and then came up to us to say that the troops had halted. That meant that we should have to take them back to camp ourselves; so we ordered them to saddle up, and, mounting our own horses and taking their guns and ammunition, we marched our prisoners back. The detachment had halted half a mile behind us. We reached the camp without incident, the Boers being evidently only too anxious to have the

business over and to learn their fate. Riding up to headquarters, we turned them over to the commanding officer, Major Moore of the Irish Fusiliers, in command of the detachment. He received them with thanks, took over their arms and horses, and then examined them through an interpreter. They had slipped away from the commando a month ago at Fourteen Streams, they said, and had since been living on their farms. Major Moore had them swear to be good—to remain neutral and not leave their farms; and then, telling them that he hoped they would agree with him to let bygones be bygones and live at peace, set them free. The Boers, greatly relieved, shook hands all around, and an incident extremely interesting to us was closed. We put in a request for the two rifles surrendered to us, and later received them as souvenirs.

Two of these men were lithe, sinewy young fellows, with swarthy faces; and all three bore themselves manfully and like worthy foemen. The same cannot be said, however, of all we met. At several farms, men who had similarly been released on parole showed a desire to propitiate us which did not prepossess us in their favor. We liked the bearing of the women better; they showed more pride, and demeaned themselves much more as man to man.

The rest of our journey to Lichtenburg we accomplished without mishap, having indeed a very pleas-

ant time of it, thanks to luck in finding ideal camping places. Our last night on the road we spent on a deserted farm which, though it had been looted by Kaffirs, still contained many evidences of a prosperous past. There were over half a dozen buildings in all, comprising stables and granaries, besides the dwelling-houses for family and servants. Water was there in abundance, a stream of rare clearness running through it. A dam served to provide a large marshy pool, which was choked with tall reeds and swarming with frogs and wild fowl, and there was nearby an acre of tall trees of many varieties, their leaves all glowing with the tints of autumn. There also we found a heap of firewood, for which we were accustomed to rely upon fence poles and broken boxes carried with us, and that evening we ate our dinner before a roaring camp fire which warmed the very cockles of our hearts and made us want to halt there for a week. But on we had to go next morning, the column overtaking us before we had finished catching all of the stray hens that had been left behind or salting away forage that we found in one of the store-houses.

At another farmhouse where we camped for the night, we found about a dozen women and children all by themselves, and among them as fair a lass as one could ask to see. Buxom she was, and rosy withal, wherein she differed from all other women we had so

far seen in South Africa. Quite a rivalry, of a sort strange to us for many weeks, sprang up between us after we had pitched our camp that evening; and each caught the others at one time or another shaving and washing with unwonted care, and generally polishing ourselves off. The maid was rather haughty, not to say snuffy, at first; but she thawed out in the evening, and even sang us a Dutch song in a voice like a calliope. Next morning we secured eggs from them, and also consummated an extremely advantageous horse deal. At the time of parting, however, Martha (that was the fair one's name) had frozen up again, and made but a most ungracious response to our farewell salutations. But she did not appear so fair by the light of morning, and perhaps she knew it. The little children were decent enough looking youngsters, fair-haired, with blue eyes and fat cheeks, but very dirty. Verily, dirt is one of the crimes of that country. Nobody who lives there seems to care to be clean. As a rule the Boers don't even wash the outside of the cup and platter. The girls are plump enough as girls, but as they grow older they seem first to grow very fat and then very thin. They lack the crowning glory of their sex in having but sparse locks. The men seem to have created a corner in hair to furnish forth their faces. There was certainly no lack of beards in the Transvaal, which, falling away

from underneath the inevitable slouch hat, made the Boers all look singularly alike.

The country we marched through was most dreary. We had hardly crossed the border when the occasional clumps of bush that we had welcomed for their green foliage vanished; and thereafter we never saw a tree save at intervals of many miles, where there happened to be surface water. During our first few days in the Transvaal, we frequently found ourselves in the center of a plain as bare as the sea, without a green spot anywhere to relieve the desolate, dry surface of the sun-parched veldt. One cannot imagine what a task it is to march through such a country. Poor Tommy Atkins on foot found it most depressing. As we drew near Lichtenburg, however, farms grew more numerous, and most of them could boast of at least a few tall trees, which furnished us the rare treat of shade for each of our last few midday meals. The little town itself, which we entered on the morning of the 5th of June, gave one the impression of being set down in a forest. As we approached it we saw nothing but trees, the buildings being mostly one-storied and never rising above the encompassing foliage. Water ran in ditches on either side of the streets, and the latter, lined with interlocking trees, seemed when one was in them like wooded lanes. The only open space was the central square lined with the government buildings, all in

stone, and boasting a few patches of green grass. Over this as we came in floated the Union Jack, at the head of a tall flag-staff before the Landrost's offices; and there also was General Hunter's red pennant waving in front of his headquarters.

At Lichtenburg we heard of the fall of Pretoria. That news dashed our hopes of assisting at that dramatic event of the war, and seemed to indicate that Lord Roberts's task was over. That it was not, however, was speedily made plain.

CHAPTER XI.

OUTWITTING DE WET AT POTCHEFSTROOM.

General Hunter's division rested at Lichtenburg until the 9th of June, completing the transfer of authority from Boer to Briton, and seeking, not without success, for hidden arms and ammunition. Then the rear guard was off again, following up headquarters to Ventersdorp, a two days' march away. We correspondents accompanied General Mahon, who, after relieving Mafeking, had rejoined the force, and was now in command of the cavalry brigade.

The burghers of Ventersdorp at first made a show of resisting British occupation. There was some criticism in General Mahon's camp of the way in which the demand for surrender was made. Three officers, including Colonel Edwards, of the Imperial Light Horse, and Major Reade, General Hunter's intelligence officer, accompanied by half a dozen men, went on in advance of General Mahon's force, which formed the vanguard of the division, and this small party of half a score entered the town under a flag of truce. Once inside, they published Lord Roberts's proclamation calling upon the burghers to surrender their arms and promising them in that

event immunity from disturbance on their farms. Then Colonel Edwards communicated to the town officials General Hunter's demand for the submission of Ventersdorp. The reply of the burghers was that there was a Boer commando in laager a few miles out of town, and that they saw no reason why this small advance party should not be made prisoners. Upon this Colonel Edwards and his force took possession of the town hall, barricaded it, and announced that General Mahon would arrive early the next day, and that if he found that his representatives had suffered any injury, Ventersdorp would be burned. This boldness gave the burghers pause; and they finally announced that they would wait to see if General Mahon did turn up. If he didn't, they would make Colonel Edwards's party prisoners.

As a matter of fact, General Mahon was not due until late the following evening. He had halted that evening about twenty miles out of Lichtenburg, intending to push on next morning to within striking distance of Ventersdorp. And so on the evening when Colonel Edwards was setting sentries behind his barricades in the town hall, General Mahon's force was resting peacefully on a little farm, with no intention of moving before seven o'clock on the following morning. But Colonel Edwards succeeded in getting a message back to Lichtenburg describing

his plight, and requesting that General Mahon be hurried forward. General Hunter at once sent out a despatch rider with orders to that effect, and these were delivered to General Mahon by midnight. He struck camp at three in the morning, and reached Ventersdorp by one o'clock that afternoon, in time to extricate Colonel Edwards's party. Thereafter there was no further show of resistance from the burghers, who flocked to the town hall and surrendered their Mausers and well-stocked bandoliers.

We rested at Ventersdorp for only twenty-four hours. Within that time information was received to the effect that De Wet with a strong force was marching on Potchefstroom, forty miles away, with the intention of holding it against us; and General Mahon determined to get there first. Orders to march were issued at once; and at four o'clock on Sunday afternoon he, with four Scottish companies of the Imperial Yeomanry and eight guns, left the town. We marched all night, halting only twice, for four hours in all; and, stealing steadily and silently along in the moonlight, by dawn had got to within a few miles of Potchefstroom, on the edge of the kopjes surrounding. The march by night had been accomplished without a hitch, and with the loss of only one man, who was temporarily disabled by a fall from his horse. The work told on the animals; but they all ended the march in fairly fit condition.

The moon set half an hour before dawn, and as we were now close to the position which the enemy would naturally select if he intended to oppose us, General Mahon halted, posted his force in readiness to attack from half a dozen points at once, and waited for the light. When it came it failed, however, to reveal any signs that we were expected; and the column took up its advance again, the General dismounting and leading the way, slightly in the rear of his advance patrols. With flanks and front carefully screened by the cavalry, we moved around toward the north to cross the railway and enter by the northeast, thus securing the railway line to Johannesburg and preventing the escape of a possible force in that direction. Feeling its way carefully along through the bitter cold of the morning, the column crept on past stony kopjes which would have furnished excellent positions for even a small force seeking to oppose our advance, and proceeded towards the town, which was still out of sight behind the crests of the undulating country in our front. We were all very much on the alert, half expecting at any moment to see jets of flame shoot out from the stony crests on either side, and to hear the whistling of passing bullets. But such expectations were not realized. Soon we were on the outskirts of the town, with scattered farmhouses and Kaffir kraals coming into view, to the doors of which came surprised and sleepy women

and children and old men, to rub their eyes and stare at us. Some of us drew up at their humble thresholds, and they bestirred themselves to get us hot coffee, and bread, and cheese, which we found most refreshing after our long march through the cold. There was no suggestion of hostility in the attitude of these people, who would not even accept payment for what they had given us; but then they told us that the town was not held by the enemy, which undoubtedly made a difference.

The column soon passed the last kopje, and on our surmounting the next rise the town lay spread out before us, a couple of miles away, at the end of a broad highway leading down over a gently-sloping plain. From here we caught sight of iron rails again, for the first time since leaving Doornbult. There was an engine off to our right, a mile and a half out of town, evidently ready for a dash toward Johannesburg; but General Mahon detached a score of troopers and sent them galloping across the plain to capture it, and the engine driver promptly obeyed the order to proceed back to the station.

All further doubt as to the absence of any hostile force was now removed; and at ten o'clock that morning we entered the town. Marching up the long street toward the central square, the troops were received with enthusiastic cheers, and, although many were unmistakably English, we had our doubts as to

the sincerity of some of them. There was no sign of the Vierkleur: the Union Jack was flying from every flag-pole, and little girls and colored housemaids were waving it from windows and doorways, while the crowds who lined the streets shook in our faces ribbons of red, white, and blue. One might have thought it their day of deliverance from horrors and terrors unnamable. Later, however, other sentiments found expression. One old farmer wept as he surrendered his rifle to an inexorable Lieutenant of Yeomanry, who, with a squad of troopers, paid a domiciliary visit to his farm; and the wife of the local printer, left behind when her husband went away on commando, amid tears of rage called down curses from heaven upon the heads of the English for confiscating his property. Others of the inhabitants, who were many of them sturdy, and by no means of the abject type with which we had become familiar in previously occupied Boer towns, stated very frankly that they were sorry that we were winning, and that they still hoped we might be overcome. One such was the barkeeper and general utility man at the Royal Hotel. He was a tall, clean-looking Dane, born there, who had fought at Magersfontein. He was most respectful in his manner toward the invaders, and served us with apparent good-will as well as despatch; but he preserved a grave demeanor, and told us, when one of us observed that the Boers would be much better off

under English rule, that that might be so, but that one could not help sympathizing with one's country. To which creditable sentiment we all agreed. Another burgher plucked me by the sleeve the first evening of our arrival, and held forth for a quarter of an hour about his sentiments and of his loathing for those of his fellow townsmen who, though like him, burghers born and bred, made haste to don hatbands or rosettes of red, white, and blue, cried themselves hoarse cheering the troops, and in sundry other "slim" ways pretended to be glad that we had come.

Peaceful Potchefstroom we found to be a pleasant enough spot, that would have been a home to be proud of as well as fond of if inhabited by anybody but Boers. It was ideally situated in a smiling valley, watered by a boisterous stream both wide and deep. The houses, nearly all homely, one-story, white-walled structures, with here and there the ubiquitous corrugated galvanized iron shanty, were set wide apart along broad and shaded streets, with rills of clear water running past on either side. It was pleasant to walk through them in the short twilight hours, or at any time when the omnipresent and all-pervading dust was not flying. The town boasted several hotels to its scattered population of four thousand, and the town hall made some successful pretense at being imposing. Most of the build-

ings, as already stated, were of the familiar South African pattern; but a few of the well-to-do inhabitants had built themselves attractive little cottages of the Queen Anne style of architecture. Some had also gone in for gardens and hedges, looking over which one got glimpses of cool, vine-shrouded verandas, set back from the streets beyond closely-growing trees and shrubs, comprising such varieties as the callous cactus, the stately blue gum, the tall pine, and graceful willows and birches without number.

But there was the usual spirit of languor and disuse brooding over everything. The houses were more than a neighborly distance apart, every family seeming to want to huddle away by itself. One result was that it took ten miles of outposts to secure our lines, so much more space than was necessary did the town take up. And nobody seemed to have anything to do. The men, in their soiled, threadbare, nondescript garments, crowned with the inevitable formless felt hats, the women, in their sun-bonnets and ill-fitting frocks, were forever slouching along the streets, or standing in silent, stolid-looking groups on the corners or in the open spaces, or sitting on the dusty stoeps. The men were always smoking an evil-smelling brand of native tobacco; and every fifth woman held a baby in her arms, or had a big-eyed, dirty-faced child clinging to her skirts.

At Potchefstroom advantage was taken by the Royal Scots Fusiliers of the opportunity to raise again, over the ruins of a small and long-abandoned fort, a famous flag that was buried at Pretoria on the restoration of independence to the Transvaal in 1881. It was the Union Jack carried by the 94th Regiment, which was almost annihilated while going to strengthen the garrison at Pretoria. The battalion of the Scots Fusiliers which formed part of General Hunter's force, attended by four pipers, assembled in the little enclosure, and to a crowd of some hundred of the inhabitants of Potchefstroom, Colonel Carr, their commanding officer, recited the history of the flag. Then the time-stained emblem was run up the flag-pole, and the troops presented arms. Tommy gave three cheers for the Queen, the crowd gave three more for the Scots Fusiliers, a guard was placed at the foot of the pole, and the ceremony was over.

With the constant augmentation of the force at Potchefstroom, as the remainder of General Hunter's division came marching in, there came the usual diminution in supplies; and very soon we had to cease regaling ourselves with eggs and fresh butter and vegetables and beer, and returned to bully beef and biscuits and "sparklets." At first, however, it was possible to be very comfortable; and our only woes were due to the monopoly of the single telegraph by

Lord Roberts, whose lines of communication through Kroonstad had been cut by the active De Wet. But everybody was cheerful; and if you had looked in of an evening upon the officers, from the General and his staff down, seated at dinner in the great hall of the Royal Hotel, and listened to the pleasant clatter of knives and forks and to the jovial conversation, you would have thought they hadn't, any of them, a care in the world.

After a two weeks' stay at Potchefstroom, while General Hunter's scouts and patrols scoured the country in search of flying bands of the enemy, and his provost marshal at the town hall received surrendered Mausers and commandeered horses, the force moved out again for the last stage of the advance to Johannesburg. We left with a flavor of uncertainty and a scent of a possible fight in the air, which furnished a welcome relief to the monotony of our previous six weeks of marching and pacification, of peaceful sitting down in unresisting towns, receiving the Mausers of submissive burghers, and appraising commandeered horses with weak knees and sore backs. But again we were disappointed in our expectations of seeing some more exciting service. We made our way with little incident through Welverdient, Doornkop (the scene of Doctor Jameson's troubles at the time of his blundering raid), and Kruegersdorp, and in the last week of June Gen-

eral Hunter marched his division, still ten thousand strong, through the suburbs of Johannesburg, and took up his position on the railway to the eastward of that city, in readiness to assist in the operations, which Lord Roberts was already preparing for, to the northward and eastward of Pretoria.

CHAPTER XII.

SEEKING LORD METHUEN.

With the successful completion of General Hunter's pacificatory march across the Transvaal, most of the war correspondents jumped to the conclusion that our period of usefulness was over, and made preparations to leave the army and return home. This opinion was strengthened by our meeting many of our fellows in Johannesburg on the way down from Pretoria. For them the long strain of months of hard campaigning was over, and we all foregathered at Heath's Hotel to talk matters over and pass a few days in the enjoyment of comforts and luxuries that had long been denied us at the front.

On every side in Johannesburg we saw the signs that justified its reputation as being in normal times the busiest and the gayest city in South Africa. Substantial buildings of brick and stone lined all of its principal and paved streets; and everywhere were evidences of the wealth for which, as one of the great mining centers of the world, it had grown famous. But at that time Johannesburg looked like a long-buried city that had just been dug out. The once busy offices and exchanges were empty and silent, and the market-places and streets were well-nigh de-

sented, echoing but seldom to any other sound than the occasional footfalls of the military patrols. The shutters were down over most of the windows, and everywhere the walls were placarded with military proclamations and police notices. A great gap in the life of the city had been made when the refugees departed for Cape Town; and the shutting down of the mines had driven away most of the great horde that had depended on them for employment. The needs of the army offered the only demands for work, and that demand was of course chiefly supplied by the troops. The strictest regulations of martial law governed the movements of the shrunken civilian population, among whom were known to be many disaffected persons who would eagerly welcome any promising chance to embarrass the military authorities.

A few days after reaching Johannesburg, I took the train for Pretoria to learn at headquarters what the prospects there were of further resistance to the inevitable from the Boers. My suspicions that much yet remained to be done were emphatically confirmed by Lord Stanley when I saw him again in that city. I found that a very thorough campaign against De Wet was being organized, with the object of finally crushing that ubiquitous Boer leader and putting an end to his harassing operations against the British rear. He was then in the Free State, hovering about

Lord Methuen's flanks, and making constant attacks upon small British garrisons and weak convoys; and Lord Stanley advised me to join Lord Methuen at once if I wanted to be present at what he predicted would be some of the most interesting operations of the war. General Hunter's division, he told me, would now be employed in garrison duty, so that I could not hope to see further active service under him. It was a stroke of ill luck that only a few days after I had left Pretoria, General Ian Hamilton fell from his horse and broke his collar-bone, and General Hunter was appointed to the vacancy and assigned to a command much more important than that which he had just led across the Transvaal.

Lord Stanley could not tell me the exact whereabouts of Lord Methuen's division. He only knew that he was somewhere in the neighborhood of Heilbron, in the Orange River colony. He warned me that the country between Johannesburg and Heilbron was not entirely secure, and that I must be prepared to fall in with small raiding parties of the enemy. I hated to miss the opportunity he gave me, however, and decided to take the risk, trusting to good luck and to the aid of Lewis's resourcefulness to see me through. So I hurried back to Johannesburg; and on the morning of the next day, the 25th of June, took the road with my Cape cart, three horses, and Lewis. My companions of the march

across the Transvaal had decided to proceed to Cape Town, so I had to make my journey alone.

My plan was to strike the railway as soon as possible, and follow the line to Wolvehoek, where I hoped to be able to get transportation over the branch line to Heilbron. We started out in beautiful weather; and, everything favoring us, we made good progress that first day over the hills that surround Johannesburg. I found the country so peaceful that I did not hesitate to stop at several Boer farms to buy bread and eggs. I had hoped to make Meyerton, where there was a small British post, that evening; but one of the horses gave out, and dark found us abreast of a mean Boer farmhouse at the roadside. There I decided to spend the night.

For courtesy's sake I went up to the door and told the two women I found inside that with their permission I would spend the night in their yard. The women were surly, and professed not to understand English; so I called Lewis up to translate my message into Dutch. They received it ungraciously, and told me that a few miles further on I would find better accommodations. Upon that I told them I should have to quarter myself upon them with or without their permission, and proceeded without further ado to pitch my bivouac against the inhospitable wall of an outhouse. It was a cold and lonely spot; but Lewis went cheerfully to work at his fire,

prepared the evening meal, and after that was disposed of entertained me during my post prandial smoke with tales of his Boer wife and of early adventures of his in the mines of Johannesburg and Kimberley. Three small boys from the farmhouse drew near and solemnly watched our behavior; but a more friendly visitor was a companionable cat. I found her curled up among my rugs when I sought my humble couch, and there she insisted on spending the night as my bed-fellow. Her contented purring was the last sound in my ears as I dropped to sleep, and she greeted me in the same cheery fashion when I opened my eyes at dawn next morning.

My horse seemed himself again after the night's rest; and after eating a breakfast in company with the faithful cat, we started off again shortly after eight. At noon we reached Vereeniging, the last station north of the Vaal. There I found a small British force, and was able to draw supplies for man and beast. My horse had weakened again, and I feared I had lost him; but he braced up after another rest, and at three o'clock we pushed on towards the Vaal. One could cross it by the railway foot-bridge, which was guarded by a sentry at either end, and by the drift. This latter was easier than that at Fourteen Streams, and Lewis got my cart across in safety, thanks to brave work by the two ponies. We pushed on to Viljoen's Drift, a settlement six miles away,

where there was another British post, and there I bivouacked for the night in the abandoned house of an English refugee. It was stripped of furniture, but was otherwise in spick and span condition. I particularly rejoiced to find near by a commodious stable, where my tired horses could look forward to a comfortable night well-sheltered from the bitter cold which now always followed the setting of the sun. An old negro who had been left in charge of the place was busy painting the interior, in readiness for his master's return, when I arrived. His boss, he assured me, would be very glad to have me make myself at home, and thus welcomed I settled down to a comfortable night under cover.

The character of the country had changed at once as soon as we crossed the Vaal. The kopjes which had marked the landscape to the north had disappeared. The veldt was flat, and, unrelieved by stick or stone, stretched away to the horizon parched and monotonous. The soil, too, had changed from red and hard to gray and soft, and the main road south was through heavy sand a good eighteen inches deep. These conditions prevailed for several miles, I learned the next morning; and after striving in vain to urge my ponies through the sand, I sought out information of an easier way and struck out across the veldt, skirting this desert of impassable sand. De Wet, I learned, was leading Lord Methuen a merry puss-in-the-

corner chase, in which he found many opportunities to swoop down upon the railway. His latest exploit had been to cut the line north of Kroonstad; and I began seriously to doubt if I should get through to Wolvehoek after all.

We plodded on, however, and by noon were within five miles of my destination. There I outspanned by the side of the road for the midday halt. An army surgeon, riding up from Wolvehoek, stopped on his way by and gave me news. Ten men and an officer had been sniped at the week before at Viljoen's Drift, from a house flying the white flag. All ten had been wounded; and the officer, who had just come out from England, had been killed. At Wolvehoek, the surgeon told me, they were in constant expectation of an attack; and of this I found abundant evidence when I at last safely reached that little junction shortly before sunset that afternoon. The few buildings were set down in an absolutely level plain, bare as far as the eye could reach of even a blade of grass, and burned black: for this was the country where the Boers set fire to the veldt scrub, for the double purpose of destroying the grazing and rendering the khaki of the British uniforms useless as a concealment. Against that dark background khaki showed up as conspicuously as pink coats in a hunting field, and it was the Boers in their dingy black who became invisible a short distance away. The few galvanized

iron shanties had all been torn down for the sake of the wood that formed their framework, and altogether the little camp presented a most doleful appearance. Captain McQuhinny of the Royal Irish was in command of the small garrison, which consisted of a few hundred men of many different regiments who had been released by Lord Roberts from the Boer prisons at Pretoria. Captain McQuhinny had no guns, and relied for protection against surprise upon a cunningly constructed barrier of "night entanglements" made out of barbed wire. The Boers were all about, he told me in a delightfully offhand way, and they often crept up after dark to amuse themselves sniping at the camp and the sentries; but so far they had not summoned up nerve enough to make a serious attack, and the only sufferers by the barbed wire entanglements had been such of his own men as had forgotten they were there and had stumbled into them in the dark. Captain McQuhinny went on to tell me that Heilbron had been undergoing a siege as a result of the cutting of the branch line from Wolvehoek by Boer raiding parties. He had got the first supply-train through only the day before, thus relieving the force there, mostly McDonald's Highlanders, who for a week or more had been on quarter rations.

That night was bitter cold. I spent it in a deserted engine-house, with an iron water-tank for my couch. Next morning the good-hearted Captain Mc-

Qulhinny got me transport on a supply-train bound for Heilbron, and I started on the last stage of my lonely trek seated in a truck crowded with the troopers of a regiment of lancers. The trucks were piled high with boxes of supplies. They offered nothing in the way of comfortable seats; but Tommy Atkins perched himself on top of them with his usual cheerful nonchalance, and he managed to extract great amusement, towards the end of the ride, when the jostling of the train proved too much for the equilibrium of the boxes, and they began to fall out. A large force of Highlanders guarded the approaches to Heilbron, and the troopers on the train laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks over the antics of the "wee Jocks," as they called their kilted comrades, as they raced down the slopes after these extra rations. A shower of falling biscuit boxes marked the last few miles of our journey; and we carried into Heilbron the merry memory of long lines of leaping Highlanders pursuing them into the depths of the ravines that lined the railway.

The first thing I learned, on disembarking at Heilbron, was that Lord Methuen had left the place a few days before. He was expected back at any time, however; so I had Lewis inspan, and we proceeded into town to find an abiding place. I found myself in a small village which, crowded as it was with troops, promised but little in the way of accommo-

dations. I learned that it boasted of two hotels, however, and these I sought out at once. The first was already full; and from the second I was turned away by the proprietor's wife, who insisted that as she was Dutch, and the Dutch and English were enemies, her hotel was closed against all men in khaki. I commended her for her spirit, and fared forth again, to find shelter finally in an abandoned cottage, where in spite of the cold I made myself very comfortable, as campaigning teaches a man to do, for the two nights and days I spent in Heilbron.

CHAPTER XIII.

PEACE-MAKING WITH LORD METHUEN.

It was in the morning of the second day that I learned at General Colvile's headquarters that Lord Methuen was not coming back, but that the Northampton regiment, then at Heilbron, had been ordered to join him, and would march in an hour. I at once made my preparations to march with them, and, proceeding to the outskirts of the town, found Major Fawcett, their commanding officer, and was by him courteously invited to accompany him. I was welcomed to the regimental mess by him and his hospitable officers, and for the fortnight that I spent with them was honored with every courtesy.

Starting a little after noon, and marching at an easy pace under the genial sun, we reached Lord Methuen's camp at Paardekraal at four. That evening I found Major Streatfield of the Grenadier Guards, press censor on his staff, to whom I had a letter from Lord Stanley, and was given a cordial welcome to the division as the only war correspondent they had seen for months. During the two weeks which I spent with that division I saw much of Lord Methuen, the genial officers of his staff, and those of the other regiments under him, especially the North-

amptons and the gallant North Lancashires, who, under Colonel Kekewich, had so distinguished themselves in the defense of Kimberley. But here again I was disappointed in my hopes of seeing any fighting. We spent the next fortnight in trekking over a small area of country and, in camp near Kroonstad, sending convoys now and then to the latter place and to Lindley, whose garrison Lord Methuen was supporting; but devoting most of the time to scouring farms, and never getting within reach of De Wet. I soon realized that to catch him would take a more nimble force than Lord Methuen's. That officer was one's ideal of a knightly soldier; but it was easy to see in the eccentricities of his conduct how sad an effect upon his mind the campaign since Magersfontein and Modder river had had. He was no longer the man to direct serious operations in the field. But he was so courteous and kindly a gentleman, and he commanded such devoted loyalty from the officers of his staff, that one could feel nothing but the sincerest sympathy for him in his misfortunes.

The work that Lord Methuen was then engaged in was the dulllest that soldiers are ever called upon to do. It well illustrated the drudgery that goes to make up peace-making at the fag end of a war. Once in a while we heard news that gave us some hope of running across the elusive De Wet, but we never arrived in time. The futility of these operations was

typified day after day when a hare lost its bearings and ran through the camp. A great hue and cry at once arose; stones, bayonets, sticks of wood, and everything else that would serve for a missile went flying through the air, and dogs went yelping after; but the fleet hare seldom failed to run the gauntlet successfully and get safely away.

Handicapped as he was, not least by slow-moving infantry and ox transport, there was nothing for Lord Methuen to do but wander about from place to place much as he had done since leaving Boshof in the middle of May, despatching conveyances now and then into beleaguered towns, but generally using his yeomen and his guns in stripping farms of their stock and produce in the effort to reduce the resources of the enemy. Of this wandering and stripping I found both officers and men heartily sick; by that time there was not even the spice of variety to it. One day was exactly like another. The General would start off in the early morning, with a few companies of Yeomanry and a couple of guns, and after a march of an hour or so over the treeless, desolate, monotonous veldt, would reach a farm, differing in no essential particular from any of the scores visited daily during the preceding weeks. There would be the clump of poplars, the one or two pans of water enclosed in a dam, a mud puddle in the yard in which ducks and geese were swimming, and the few outhouses near

the main dwelling, which was generally mean and unsightly, with an untidy kitchen garden at the back,—or at the front, for it was always difficult to tell which was which. When the General and his staff came up there was always the same group on the doorstep: an old woman in soiled and ragged clothes, who promptly began to weep; a middle-aged woman, generally with a baby in her arms, who wore throughout the proceedings a mask of impervious stolidity; and anywhere from three to eight children, ranging from fifteen years of age down to four or three, who wept or not as the spirit moved them. The General's first question always was, "Where is the man?" The reply, in those parts at least, was almost invariably, "On commando." By the terms of Lord Roberts's forage orders, that answer doomed the women to suffer confiscation of all their stock and forage, saving only enough for the household to live upon. If the owner happened to be on his farm, then only what was needed for the use of the troops was requisitioned, always provided he took the oath to abstain from further fighting.

Such was the foreground of this constantly-repeated picture. In the middle distance were troopers, their horses standing by, loading bundles of forage and bags of mealies into wagons; in the background, Kafirs were rounding up and driving off herds of sheep and oxen; and beyond all, scattered

kopjes, and the interminable khaki-colored veldt. This was the fag-end of the war all over the defunct Free State, save in occasional spots, where some force did succeed in coming in touch with De Wet, and an insignificant skirmish, generally without result, ensued. And the warriors who had fought at Magersfontein and Modder river were sick of it—sick of the sight of the shabby women and the untidy farms, and of the sound of sobs. They knew this uncongenial work had to be done, for each of these farms was used as a depot by the Boers, who would stay out just so long as they could find supplies. But they yearned to have it over with; to finish De Wet in one square, stand-up fight, and to be on their way home. It certainly was not an inspiring sight to see a Lieutenant-General of the British army sitting on the stoep of a dingy farmhouse saying he hoped the war would soon be over, to a group of women wringing their hands in his face. It was Lord Roberts's opinion that with De Wet's capture the war would be over. Everybody hoped he was right, for both officers and men in that division were wearied by those futile pursuits of an enemy that would not stand, by the sudden orders to move at dark hours in the cold mornings, and by the forced marches that too often followed them, with nothing at the end but evidences that the enemy had been there, but, having received timely warning of

Lord Methuen's approach, had cleared out the day before.

It would not be fair to say that this was the only work that Methuen's force was fit for. The Third Yeomanry, the three batteries of artillery, the Northampton and North Lancashire regiments of foot, were as effective for any kind of work as any of their comrades, as they had proved recently enough at Swartzkopjefontein and at Lindley and at Heilbron. But it was the opinion at headquarters that pacification, which was almost entirely police work, was all that Lord Methuen, whatever troops he commanded, could be relied upon for.

I early resolved to take my first opportunity to flee to other fields. And at last it came. On Thursday, the 12th of July, Lord Methuen received sudden orders to move at once with his whole force to Kroonstad, then some forty miles from his camp. What the orders meant no one knew: but it was surmised that Lord Roberts wanted the division at Pretoria, and it turned out later that that guess was correct. But to me it meant the disappearance of probably my last chance to see any further active service, for it took us away from the fields that De Wet was scouring. We had heard from Lindley that Generals Clements and Paget, after heavy fighting, had forced the Boer down upon Bethlehem, on the Basutoland border; and, what was particularly galling news to

me, that General Hunter, whom I had left at Johannesburg in the belief that he would have no more fighting to do, was hurrying down towards that town with 20,000 troops of all arms. And so it was with a heavy heart that I made my preparations for the march to Kroonstad. But an hour later my prospects had completely changed. A small detachment of Yeomanry rode into camp just as Lord Methuen's advance guard was moving off. The detachment had left Bethlehem two days before as escort to an officer bearing despatches from General Clements to Lord Methuen. It was to return immediately, marching back to Lindley that night and proceeding thence with all speed to rejoin General Clements, who with General Hunter was closing in on De Wet and was expected to give battle at any moment. It would have been folly for me to attempt to get to Bethlehem alone. With this escort, however, I could do it; and in ten minutes I had made my decision. I knew the officer, a young Lieutenant of Yeomanry, who was to take the detachment back, and he gladly accepted the offer of my company. And at six that evening we were off. Lord Methuen's rear guard had already disappeared into the southwest, and all that was left of what had been before a busy camp of five thousand men was a score of smouldering rubbish heaps, onto which the troops had flung oatsacks, empty tins, broken saddle-girths, and all the other refuse that

was not worth carrying away, not to mention some that was, which rewarded the Kaffirs who roamed over the scene, after the force had departed, searching for what might be of use to them. Black darkness had now settled down over the veldt, and with the night had come the bitter cold of the South African midwinter. Lindley, whither our way led, was a five hours' march away. But the scent of battle was in our nostrils now; and darkness, cold, and danger were utterly negligible quantities. My companion gave his final orders for the march, sent forward his advance guard of five, assigned a couple of troopers to either flank, and detailed half a dozen more to act as rear guard; and with the order "Walk, March!" he and I placed ourselves at the head of the main body of a score of troopers and started forward.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITH HUNTER AGAIN.

We marched for three hours, and then halted by the side of the road for a brief rest and a scanty meal of hot coffee and biscuits. Resuming our way an hour later, we reached Lindley's picket lines a little after one o'clock in the biting cold of the morning, and shortly afterwards filed into the sleeping town and took up our quarters in a house where a score more of the little force, under command of a cheery young Lieutenant of Yeomanry, had been left the day before.

We remained in Lindley during the following day to rest our tired horses. I visited the officers of the regiment guarding the town, whose acquaintance I had made on a previous visit with a convoy sent in by Lord Methuen. Lindley was a town which was occupied, abandoned, and re-occupied alternately by Boers and British half a dozen times. It needed a division to hold it; but it was garrisoned for weeks by one battalion of a famous regiment, under the command of an officer so deficient in intelligence and capacity, in all the qualities, in short, that a Colonel ought to have, that hardly one of his mess could speak of him without displaying either rage or mirth. The other officers of the little force were, with one or two

exceptions, as fine a set of men as one could meet anywhere. Most of them had seen service in India, and war and death had no terrors for them. I found them encamped on the upper slope of a huge rock, in the only spot in the place where they could be shelled from only three sides at once instead of four, and expecting every moment an attack from De Wet, for which they had a week before been warned by heliograph to hold themselves in readiness. But they jested as to what their Colonel would do when the enemy appeared, as much as they speculated on the chances of relief; and their only grievance was that their C.O. was such a "bloody fool" that they couldn't have a chance to do what they knew the regiment was capable of doing.

We left Lindley, sixty strong, early in the morning of Saturday, and took the road for Bethlehem. The young officer whom we had rejoined at Lindley and I got much entertainment out of the journey. In accordance with his orders from General Paget, we searched many farms for hidden stores of forage, of which there was great lack among the British troops in Bethlehem. Of this we secured a fair quantity; and we also picked up some fowls, which proved a most welcome addition to our somewhat scanty supply of food. Straying away from the line of march, I also ran across a herd of horses that had been left to pick up their own living on the veldt when their

owners went off on commando. Among them was a fine young three-year-old which had never been broken, as I found out to my cost when, after driving him into camp, I caught him and tried to ride him. He would have made an ideal saddle-horse had I had time to give him a few more lessons ; but I had to abandon him later when we started off after De Wet.

We camped that night on the farm of Commandant Prinsloo. He was in the field with De Wet at the time ; but we were welcomed by his wife and an interesting family of twelve, mostly dark-haired girls, the eldest of whom was fifteen. Their father was a man of parts, who, unlike the majority of his countrymen, appreciated the value of a good education : and his two eldest daughters could speak English. That evening they invited us officers into the house and entertained us for an hour or more singing hymns to the accompaniment of a parlor organ.

On the road next morning we got into communication with General Paget, and I learned to my great delight that General Hunter and his whole force were still at Bethlehem, watching De Wet, who remained in the hills a few miles south of the town. At one o'clock we reached the place ; and shortly afterwards I greeted General Hunter once again. He welcomed me with all his old grave courtesy, and told me what he could of the situation. De Wet was strongly entrenched in the hills half a dozen miles to the south,

with a force estimated at fifteen hundred men and six or seven guns. General Hunter had been prevented by the difficulty in getting supplies from closing in on him at once; but he hoped by the end of the week to be able to complete the cordon that he was drawing around him.

How that hope was disappointed is now history. That very night the wily De Wet forestalled General Hunter's plans by slipping through the lines held by Generals Clements and Paget; and on the next day there began the pursuit the incidents of which have furnished some of the most dramatic and exciting episodes of the war.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHASE OF DE WET BEGINS.

I woke up next morning with the sound of big guns in my ears. Hurrying over to headquarters to learn what was up, I found standing outside a group of officers, conspicuous among whom was General Hunter talking to a grizzled veteran in the uniform of a brigadier. The former told me that De Wet with a strong force had slipped out through Slabbert's Nek during the night, had got safely past Clements and Paget, and was now fighting a rear-guard action with the latter's force. General Ridley, the officer with whom he was talking, was about to take the field with his brigade of mounted infantry, and give chase; and General Hunter advised me to accompany him. He thereupon introduced me to General Ridley, who was even then receiving his final orders.

There was no time to lose. Learning the road they were to take, I hurried back to the Royal Hotel, where I had left Lewis. He was not in sight when I galloped into the yard, and my heart sank lest he should have gone away beyond call. But fortunately he was not far off; I found him after a brief hurried search, and set him to work at once repacking the cart, inspanning, and getting everything

ready for an immediate start. We were both well used to such quick marching orders, and in ten minutes everything was done. I ordered him to proceed at once to the spot on the outskirts of the town where we had first halted the day before, to wait for me there, and then to follow us out along the Senekal road. I then galloped back to headquarters, and found General Ridley just on the point of leaving.

That scene was just as one would expect to see it described in a book or depicted on the stage. The two Generals, erect and military, stood in the centre of a group formed by the officers of their staffs, those of General Hunter being on foot, while General Ridley's attendants were already in the saddle. An orderly, with rifle slung on shoulder, and bandolier stuffed full of cartridges, held the latter's horse for him to mount; while another orderly stood at his own horse's head near by, bearing the red pennant of a brigadier, which it was his duty to carry behind his General. In the background was the low red-painted cottage where General Hunter had established his headquarters, with flagstaff in front from which floated his crimson flag, its folds stirring lazily in the gentle puffs of wind that now and again blew down the dusty street. Just as I joined the group General Ridley mounted, his standard-bearer drew up behind him, General Hunter called out a cheery

good-bye, and, putting spurs to our steeds, we started off at a gallop. The chase of De Wet had begun.

Our little cavalcade of eight went clattering through the main street of the town without drawing rein. Women and children scampered out of our way, and then stood still to gaze at us. At the appointed spot I passed Lewis, and signaled to him to follow. Leaving Bethlehem behind us we rode steadily on for an hour and a half, easing our horses only at the foot of the occasional hills, and at about sunset drew up at a respectable farmhouse built on the slope of one of the smaller kopjes lying at the foot of the pass through which De Wet had slipped out early that morning, when he left his eyrie in the towering hills that loomed grim and dark before us along the border of Basutoland. General Ridley's brigade had already arrived, and was encamped near by.

We dined that evening in the farmhouse, in somewhat haphazard fashion, nearly every mouthful interrupted by the arrival of an orderly bringing despatches from General Paget, telling of the day's engagement and of his plans for the morrow. Their burden was that De Wet, accompanied by his brother Piet and ex-President Steyn of the defunct Orange Free State, had, as General Hunter had already informed us, slipped out through Slabbert's Nek during the preceding night; that his force was probably eighteen hundred strong, with a dozen guns; that he

had a convoy of some hundred bullock wagons and Cape carts; that Paget and Clements had been engaged all day with his rear guard without substantial result; and that General Ridley could best assist by marching as early as possible next morning and joining him with all speed. General Hunter, to whom General Ridley forwarded these reports, made a different disposition, however, of the forces. He retained Clements and Paget near Bethlehem; and late that night sent orders for Ridley to attach himself to General Broadwood's force, then a part of Paget's brigade, and to proceed with him in pursuit of the enemy. General Ridley, late that evening, expressed himself as sanguine that we should catch up with the latter next day. But we learned later that the Boer General had got his main body away without firing a shot, assigning only a handful of men under Piet De Wet to occupy Paget and Clements, and thus cover his main movement; and it was three days later before the British got in touch with him again.

Calling in his officers and giving them their final orders that night, General Ridley struck camp in the chilly dawn of the next day. At about ten we caught up with General Broadwood, who had waited for us, and went forward at once. Our combined force, comprising Ridley's Mounted Infantry and Broadwood's Household Cavalry, was about equal in numbers to

De Wet's, but inferior in artillery, a circumstance which rendered it unsafe for Broadwood to attack, and fully justified General Hunter's orders to attempt nothing more for the present than to keep as close behind the enemy as possible and harass his rear until another force could be stationed across his path.

This General Hunter hoped to accomplish with Colonel Little and Colonel Ewart, then moving down towards Bethlehem with a large convoy from Lindley. But these officers failed to get their orders to co-operate in time; and when we joined them the next day we found that, being in ignorance of the near neighborhood of our force, they had stood aside and let De Wet pass, thankful at having escaped an attack on their convoy. As a result, De Wet had succeeded in slipping between the two forces and now had a start of a good eighteen miles.

General Broadwood added some of Colonel Ewart's guns and cavalry to his own force, and then resumed his dreary work of trying to keep on De Wet's trail. For information as to the direction he had taken, we had to rely upon the natives and such interpretation of hoof and wheel-marks as scouts in our force could supply. The natives were mostly only too willing to help us; but the wily Boer doubled back and forth and picked out his course with consummate cunning, and our march was interrupted by frequent halts dur-

ing which the two Generals would cross-question the Kaffirs whom we encountered, or would mount some high kopje and carefully scan the distant horizon for some dust-cloud or other sign of our quarry, while our scouts went afield searching for the trail.

During the first few days we picked up only the scantiest scraps of news, valuable only as going to prove that the course which we had followed with so many turnings had led us in a generally correct direction. But there were no evidences that we were closing the gap between us. Once or twice the scent failed us altogether; and looking forth across the trackless veldt to the horizon, cut up by close, encircling kopjes and ranges which sadly limited the view, and taking note as we could not but do of the innumerable ways by which our enemy might double on his tracks or otherwise utterly baffle us, we began to weary of this apparently profitless rising in the cheerless, chilling dawn, and to despair of any success in the chase. But the scent when lost was always picked up again, thanks to General Broadwood's shrewd judgment in discriminating between the true information and the false; and in the afternoon of Thursday, the fourth day of the chase, we were rewarded for our persistence by catching sight of our quarry at last.

We were then going westward on a line some dozen miles north of Lindley, which town we had encircled

in a course of the shape of the letter "S," the scent having led us eastward to the south of Lindley on Tuesday. On that Thursday morning Kaffirs reported to us that the Boers were not more than a few hours' march ahead; and not long afterwards, from the top of a rise, we made out dimly in the far distance some of their wagons, just disappearing over the skyline. As the Boers when trekking always sent their wagons on ahead, we knew that we must be at last fairly close upon their rear guard.

Pressing on with a new eagerness, towards noon we came across their laager of the night before, with the embers still smouldering in the ant-hills, which provide very serviceable ovens for the ingenious South African; and an hour later we caught sight of figures standing out clearly on the skyline some four miles ahead. We had run them down at last.

The pace of the column was now quickened, and our advance and flank guards were pushed ahead to reconnoitre. Generals Broadwood and Ridley, with whom I was riding, trotted ahead with the advance guard towards the place in the skyline where the Boers could now be easily counted with the naked eye. The officers halted some fifty yards ahead of a kraal of Kaffir huts and walled enclosures, and, taking out their glasses, closely scrutinized the skyline. A moment later, with unexpected suddenness, the fight began, the Boers themselves taking the initiative by

opening fire on our little group where it stood out conspicuously in the open. The wily Boer commander had purposely placed his men in plain view on the skyline, in order to draw our attention away from a ridge below, and within fourteen hundred yards of us. The ridge at that distance attracted no notice, as it seemed at a casual glance to be a part of the main slope leading up to the skyline upon which all eyes were directed. As a matter of fact, a valley separated the main slope from the ridge. The latter was crowned by the partly-broken-down stone wall of an old cattle-pen, and behind this wall were posted half a dozen Boer sharpshooters, who knew to a foot the range to our position and were favored by all the conditions necessary to a good aim.

Our first indication of their presence was the sudden appearance of some spurts of dust on the ground some twenty-five yards ahead of us, which was instantly followed by that unmistakable sound of rifle fire. The next moment we heard the shrill humming of bullets (it is not an unpleasant sound) in our ears as a second volley passed over our heads, and the Mausers cracked again. A quiet order, "Take cover, men!" came from General Broadwood. The little force wheeled their horses to the right about just as the Boers fired a third volley. One of our men was hit then; but he gave no sign of it, and it was only afterwards that we learned that the Boer sharpshoot-

ers had found a mark at last. Officers and men walked back and took cover behind the walls in our rear. "It's the only way to do when you have men with you," said General Ridley to me as we found a nook on the firing line whence in comparative safety to watch the effect of the shooting about to begin. "If I had been alone, though," he added, "I'd have run like hell."

One feels a natural resentment at being fired at from such close quarters and being so nearly hit. General Broadwood at once called up his guns, and in less time than it takes to tell it his cavalry had dismounted, led their horses under cover, and, with the gleam of battle in their eyes, had slipped into places behind the wall at which we were already standing and opened fire on the ridge. A moment later the guns began to speak; and at once the hills were resounding with the rattle of Mausers, the cracking of the British Metfords at our side in reply, the quick barking of the pom-poms, and the hoarse roar of the fifteen-pounders. The Boers who had first fired on us broke cover very quickly, and we soon saw them scuttling up the main slope at full gallop towards the skyline. Two of our field-guns blazed away at the scattering group; but our fire was not quite true, and they all got away.

In the meantime, from a farmhouse on our left and from other lurking-places, other bands had opened

fire on us, and the peculiar double rattle of the Mausers, sounding for all the world like the blows of a hammer on an iron boiler, became more incessant than ever. Maxims and field-guns were at once trained on these places too; and Colonel Legge, with some of the Australians, was sent to help clear them out. This he quickly accomplished; and, urged on by Tommy's extremely accurate rifle fire and by good shooting by the gunners, the Boers were soon scuttling from all their advanced positions. Those on the skyline opposite our centre were also on the move now, scampering away from the screaming shells that were dropping all about them; and Colonel De Lisle with eight hundred mounted infantry galloped around our right to hustle them along. From the ridge originally held by them he advanced to turn them still more; and as he pushed on, the centre, led by General Ridley, followed in support. The gallant De Lisle found a hornet's nest in a spruit beyond the rise, and suffered a score of casualties in clearing it out; but he gave the Boers all that he got, and more. On the left the enemy would not stand before Legge, though three of the latter's Australians fell victims to a ruse on the part of some Boers dressed in British khaki and helmets, who beckoned them within easy range and then with a curse shot them down. These dashing colonials also lost one of their best officers, Major Moore. He was hit in the thigh by an ex-

plosive bullet, and bled to death before help could reach him.

Meanwhile General Ridley went galloping over the field with tireless energy, taking close note of every move. I rode with him, and paid for that privilege by being shot at twenty times before darkness put an end to the fighting. The brigadier scorned to take any precautions whatever, and always followed the shortest line between one advanced position and the next. The consequence was that he was constantly on the skyline and as constantly being fired at by the Boers. But the latter, though they came uncomfortably near us, and dropped several men near by, couldn't quite hit us: and General Ridley and all who were in immediate attendance upon him came off scot free.

By the time night fell we had hustled the Boer rear guard along six miles in three hours, and found ourselves in possession of their main position. There both Generals established their headquarters, and orderlies were sent off to locate the different units of our force and bring them closer in from their scattered positions. General Ridley's transport had not come up, nor had mine: but General Broadwood hospitably invited us to share his mess. Hunger was thus satisfied; but we had no protection from the biting chill of the night air, our greatcoats being out of reach with our other baggage. Our supper fin-

ished, and our transport still failing to put in an appearance, we drew up around a fire some Tommies had built, and there in a close circle we sat down on the ground, each, from the General down, taking turns at warming first our hands and faces and then turning to give our freezing backs a chance. There we sat or lay, not very comfortable, but cheerful withal, and passed the time in one way or another, chatting or trying to snatch a little sleep, until just before midnight, when our baggage finally found us, and we rolled up in our blankets to pass the rest of the night in warmth and comfort.

CHAPTER XVI.

DE WET AT BAY ON THE VAAL.

General Broadwood had reasoned that it was hopeless to attempt to catch De Wet while hampered by so slow-moving a convoy as we were taking with us, and so decided to load as much in the way of supplies as we could carry in light wagons and carts and to cut loose from the rest of the baggage, which could follow on at its own more leisurely pace. To carry out this decision involved a delay of several hours; and when we started on again, a little after noon on the following day, De Wet had got another start, and it was five days later when we ran him down again.

But not once during that time did he get far ahead of us; the pace was beginning to tell upon him too. Firing began again on the first day just after dawn, from scattered parties of the enemy who had lingered behind De Wet's main column to harass us, and our advance patrols were able to keep in almost constant touch with him. On the third day we crossed the Rhenoster, and struck the railway at Kopjes Station, where we again had to halt for a whole afternoon to replenish our stock of supplies, then practically exhausted. There, however, we learned that De Wet

was only six miles ahead of us, and hopes that we would speedily catch up with him again arose. De Wet had found time and opportunity, however, to inflict some more damage on his foes. Crossing the railway to the south of Rhenoster river, almost at the scene of his earlier mail-burning debauch, he had cut it and the telegraph line for several miles, and had also captured another train which conveniently steamed up within his reach. This train contained many tons of "hospital comforts," dainties and delicacies of various kinds for the sick and wounded, and a hundred odd soldiers as a guard. Both of these lots Christian annexed, and then proceeded north towards Vredefort and the Vaal, which, according to Lord Roberts's information, he intended crossing, that he might bring aid and comfort to his sore-pressed ally, Oom Paul.

As soon as Broadwood had loaded a fresh stock of supplies on his wagons, we were off on the trail again. The first day was marked only by the usual evidences that the hare was not far ahead of the hounds. On Monday evening we camped eight miles south of Vredefort; and on Tuesday morning were away again at dawn. At nine o'clock, when within a mile of Vredefort, we met with the first encouragement, in the shape of five wagons, which we caught sight of a couple of miles to our left. We could see as we came into view that they were moving at top speed; and a squad of cavalrymen were at once sent off in pur-

suit. Soon the welcome sound of shooting gave us final proof that they were the enemy's, and we all felt sure that he was at last within our clutches; we had never got within reach of any part of his convoy before.

Satisfied that the small party he had detached could deal with the wagons, General Broadwood took his main force on into the little town of Vredefort. There, we were told, the enemy had spent the previous night. There for the moment officers and men gave their whole attention to the replenishment of mess supplies, for during a long absence from shops such luxuries as tobacco and food other than army rations had become uncomfortably scarce. The result was a descent in force upon the two general stores and one bakery in town, while small parties went galloping from house to house in search of butter and bread and eggs. There was no looting, everything being paid for according to the British fashion; but the press was such that the inhabitants had to trust to the honesty of the troops, who swarmed behind counters and everywhere else seeking what they might devour.

But meanwhile those five wagons had not yet been captured. The party first sent after them had proved too weak to beat off the Boer escort, and a stronger force of three hundred mounted infantry had been sent galloping off to overtake the party, which by

this time was drawing near the hills that line the Vaal. Here, it speedily developed, the Boers were posted in force to cover the retreat of the wagons. The chase grew most exciting as the horsemen, taking snapshots now, drew nearer to the wagons, which in their turn were rapidly approaching their own goal. For a moment it looked as if they would get away; but just in the nick of time the British troopers caught them up. There was a sharp skirmish almost under the noses of the supporting Boers, but it quickly ended in Tommy's favor; and the wagons, together with eighteen Boers found inside, were soon on their way back to the rear under a strong escort.

It having become evident that the Boers were holding the hills in force, Colonel Legge had been ordered, so soon as he had captured the wagons, to reconnoitre ahead, but General Ridley had particularly cautioned him against advancing too far. This caution, however, Colonel Legge did not strictly heed, but led his force of between three and four hundred, into a position which subsequently became untenable. The Boers unmasked a gun on their right flank, and Legge speedily found himself under an extremely heavy shell and rifle fire, which soon began to tell. How heavy it was is indicated by the circumstance that during the hour that the fight lasted his men fired 23,000 rounds.

For the time he could hold his own, his men being

under good cover on a farm. But General Broadwood, seeing how strong a position the Boers held, and in what force (it was evident that they had determined to make a stand on the Vaal), did not deem it prudent to risk a general engagement, and gave the order for a general retirement to a ridge a couple of miles in his rear. The guns were placed in position to cover the retreat of the flanks, and slowly and reluctantly Legge's men abandoned the farm. It was during his retreat that practically all the day's casualties occurred. A force of some seven hundred Boers had come out into the open in their attempt to out-flank Legge—a rare manœuvre for them. They failed of their object; but they killed or wounded thirty of Legge's men during the running fight. The retirement was finally effected in good order, however, and the whole force bivouacked in face of the enemy's position about four miles away.

There it remained for nearly two weeks, awaiting further instructions from Lord Roberts, and for the reinforcements which General Broadwood at once asked for. The enemy also held his position, making no attempt to cross the Vaal. Under these circumstances, what was needed was the despatch of a force from the north to attack De Wet in the rear. If Lord Roberts could have got one down in time it would have been another Paardeburg. But it was useless to hope for Broadwood alone to settle the

matter. The Boers, as it later developed, were fully twice his strength by this time, thanks to accessions from among burghers who had taken the oath of neutrality. As De Wet passed through the districts supposed to have been pacified, these burghers dug up their buried rifles and flocked to his standard ; and his force was not far short of 3,500 strong when he took up his position along the Vaal near Vredefort. In addition to their superiority in numbers, the Boers had the advantage of an exceptionally strong position. The war had made it plain that a force four times as large is needed to cope with an enemy thus placed and armed with modern weapons, although on this occasion Gen. Ridley was confident that it could be done with another battalion of infantry to hold the centre while the cavalry turned the flanks, and another field battery. Without some reinforcements, however, Gen. Broadwood was unquestionably right in retiring. If he had attacked, it would only have been to repeat Magersfontein. And what a reverse of that magnitude would have meant at that stage of the war can be imagined.

These two engagements of Broadwood's were not to be classed as battles, nor did they bear important results. But they were interesting, if for no other reason than in giving further evidence that every fight or skirmish in which the British were engaged gave opportunities for the display of the highest

courage. The young officer on the staff of course faces death twenty times a day on his trips to and from the firing line with the General's orders. But, in addition, one constantly sees or hears of deeds such as one performed during this latest fight with De Wet, the official report of which carried with it a recommendation for the Victoria Cross. One of the medical officers was behind the firing line with Colonel Legge's corps, when an officer fell some distance in front, shot through the stomach. The Boers were pouring in a hot fire from a distance of only three hundred yards, but the "med" ran out into it, picked up the wounded man, and brought him in. A similar incident occurred at a kraal near the farmhouse occupied by Legge's men. It was held by a body of Australians when the order came to retire. Another body was in the open, and both had been outflanked by the Boers. An officer requested the Australians to hold their position for a few moments to cover the retirement of a small party who were bringing in a wounded officer. The colonials were falling fast, but they stayed. I saw their Captain come in later, leading a dozen troopers. "These are all I have left out of a squadron," he said. There was a bullet-hole through his cap, and the ambulance was just passing slowly by with one of his men, with a shattered arm, walking beside it, and three more inside.

The young officer, especially he of the crack regi-

ments, often talks with a drawl, and appears to be bored with all the features of life. But he is at his best in action. Then his utter indifference to everything, whether it be bullets or a bit of repartee, sits very well on him, and you have nothing but admiration for the calmness with which he salutes his General with a "Right, sir!" and gallops off with his orders to the hottest part of the field. His women-folk should see him then. They wouldn't be so hard on him afterwards when he couldn't see a joke.

General Broadwood was an excellent type of the self-possessed soldier. Tall, lithe, with the lean face of a man in perfect condition, he never lost his poise. It was no pleasant thing for a British General, especially in the Boer war, to give the order to retire. And yet he gave it on that day outside Vredefort in exactly the same quiet tones which I heard him use towards the close of our first day's fight with De Wet, when he pointed to a nearby ridge and directed an officer to find out if it was occupied by the enemy. And the officer led his twenty men up to it at a gallop. It was clear, I was glad to see; for if it hadn't been, not many of the twenty would have come back.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT BAY AT VREDEFORT.

De Wet, contrary to the firm belief entertained at headquarters at Pretoria, made no attempt to cross the Vaal; and for twelve days General Broadwood held his position near Vredefort, waiting patiently for the reinforcements he had asked for. For the first few days officers and men worked hard, making the position secure and closing so far as was possible every outlet through which the enemy might break away to the south again. His first act was to draw around De Wet's position a thin line of khaki all of fourteen miles long. It was not overstrong; but the enemy did not once dare to cross it, though he made several half-hearted attempts, only to lose courage in the end. Knowing how strong the enemy was, there was not a night during that anxious fortnight that we did not turn in fully prepared to be aroused before dawn to meet an attack which the officers felt might come at any moment. And we constantly wondered why De Wet did not hurl most of his force against our right flank, as he was amply strong enough to do, and, holding that in check, send his convoy off to the east towards Parys and Lindeque Drift, where he could hope for an easier passage of the river. But

De Wet did none of the things that he might have done during that first week, and thereby caused General Ridley and his officers not a little disappointment. General Ridley was in command of the right flank, holding, with a thousand mounted infantry and half a dozen guns, the weakest part of General Broadwood's long line. But even this would not tempt De Wet; and it began to be evident after a while that not until reinforcements arrived could we expect the stand-up fight that we hoped would settle the business and clear the field of the last force which, in Lord Roberts's estimation, prevented the termination of the war.

And everyone was very keen to close with De Wet. He had many admirers among General Ridley's officers; and while discussing our dinner before the camp-fire in the chilly evenings we often spoke of how we would make a guest of him if we ever had the luck to make him prisoner. The British honored him for the skill he had displayed in the exciting chase he had led us across the Orange River Colony. It was a spectacular performance, even when account was taken of the fact that De Wet knew every foot of the country, and that it was entirely friendly to him. And now, at bay, firmly entrenched along the Vaal, he was holding off the only force that Lord Roberts so far had been able to send against him, absolute master of the situation until additional troops could be sent down from the

north to invest his position from the rear. That achievement bespoke qualities for which many of those who had fought him before and hoped to fight him again honored him as a foeman worthy of their steel.

But meanwhile the officers in our camp near Vredefort had ample time, notwithstanding the need of constant vigilance, for resentment against the authorities for not despatching additional troops with more speed. The trouble seemed to be that the intelligence officers at headquarters, who, as had been shown on many occasions, were not always as intelligent as they might have been, had not been able to make up their minds that De Wet would not cross the Vaal. Confident that he would, they concluded that it would be a waste of energy to send more troops on a stern chase, and so devoted their efforts to assembling forces in front of him. But by delaying to reinforce Broadwood they let a golden opportunity slip by: and their original plan, which might have redeemed the situation, failed because Lord Methuen, who had by that time reached Potchefstroom, to the north of De Wet's position, would not move down fast enough or near enough to the Vaal.

As a matter of fact, it became evident two days after De Wet ran to cover there that for the present at least he would not leave the Free State. Whether because his animals were too tired or because his

burghers refused to leave their own land, he let two precious days go by. That gave Lord Methuen time to reach Potchefstroom; and if those at headquarters had responded at once to General Broadwood's urgent call for more troops, it should have been possible to get up a strong enough force from the south to enable him to attack.

Such speculations, combined with the strain of constantly watching a resourceful foe who was amply strong enough to dash out and attempt to force our weaker line, left the Generals and their staffs little time for leisure. To the less hard-worked officers, however, and in fact to most of us, the time hung heavy on our hands; and we spent much of the day sleeping, or lying lazily in the shade of our tents, reading old books or newspapers or dreaming of voyages home. Under such circumstances comparatively unimportant incidents acquire quite an overpowering interest. On one afternoon nearly everybody in General Ridley's camp, where we lay guarding that right flank twelve miles away from headquarters, was absorbed in watching a duel between two Royal Artillery fifteen-pounders, in General Broadwood's camp, and two of the Boer guns, evidently Creusots, a couple of miles away. The latter were close together near a farmhouse, barely discernible through glasses, resting among some tall green trees at the foot of one of the kopjes which lined the Vaal; while

Broadwood's guns were cleverly screened below the crest of a tiny kopje out in the plain. From these respective positions the rival gunners amused themselves and us for three hours firing shrapnel at each other.

It was the mutter of the far-away guns that first called our attention to the fact that something was toward. Keyed up as we had been for days in the expectation that De Wet might at any moment make an attempt against one or another portion of our line, we all trooped up to the crest of the rise below which our camp was laid out, and, catching sight of the little clouds of smoke drifting away from over the invisible guns, we settled ourselves comfortably down against the ant-hills or stretched out on the ground and brought glasses or telescopes or naked eye to bear.

There was not much to be seen at that distance; but such as the spectacle was, it held our closest attention for the three hours that the entertainment lasted. After a while it became possible to make out which puffs were which. Those to the left must be from Broadwood's guns, we concluded, and those by the trees from the weapons served by De Wet's German artillerymen. Very soon we noticed that a few moments after the thick cloud of smoke appeared, to tell that one gun or another had been fired, a tinier puff of lighter smoke would show above the opposite position and betray the bursting shell. It all sug-

gested a display of fireworks set off by impatient enthusiasts who could not wait until dark, and it proved to be quite as harmless. We watched the shrapnel bursting in an ominous cloud apparently directly in the smoke of Broadwood's guns, and looked to hear later of serious casualties; but we learned next day that the Boers had not succeeded in hitting even a mule. As Broadwood "helioed" back to Ridley in reply to the latter's question, "What's going on?" "Nothing going on but gunnery." At sunset the gunnery subsided, and we all went back to camp. Next day there was more practice, participated in by two four-point-seven naval guns which had just reached Broadwood. We were satiated now, and nobody paid much attention this time; but the Boers had the luck to wound four men.

Two days later occurred an incident which went to show what a part chance plays in the fate of armies. Captain Lord Charles Bentinck of the Ninth Lancers, General Ridley's Chief of Staff, had ridden out with another officer to look over some entrenchments that the troops had been throwing up that day. Not many hundred yards away from these, and commanding very effectively General Ridley's camp, was a slight rise in the veldt, not quite marked enough to be worthy of the name of kopje, formed by an outcrop of rock and crowned by the crumbling walls of an abandoned Kaffir kraal. A Boer gun there would

have quickly forced General Ridley to vacate his position. Here had, of course, been posted a picket.

As the two officers, quite by chance, trotted up to the entrenchments, they suddenly heard the crackling of Mausers. A moment later an excited sergeant ran up to them from the direction of the firing and reported that two hundred Boer horsemen had attacked the picket and driven it in. "What men are those?" asked Lord Charles when he had silenced the excited sergeant, pointing to half a dozen figures that could be seen moving about behind the walls of the kraal, a few hundred yards away. "Ours, sir!" was the reply. It had hardly been uttered when, "ping! phutt!" and a sprinkling of bullets sputtered into the ground about the three men. Not far off, huddled in a group, stood the score of men composing the picket that had been driven in, leaderless, and quite at a loss what to do. Lord Charles wasted no time. Sending one of the men back for reinforcements, he called to the rest to come on, and led them up against the kraal, to which the supporting Boers in the plain were rapidly drawing near. But he was in time. As the rallied picket advanced at the double, the handful of Boers already in the kraal cleared out, and as they joined their comrades the latter turned their horses and also galloped off. Thus it all ended well. But if those two hundred Boers had been allowed to reach the kraal, they could probably have held it

until a gun was brought up, and then it would have gone hard with our camp.

As a contrast to such strains on our anxiety, an adventure of General Ridley's on that same afternoon, though it just missed being a tragedy, had a happy ending that put everybody at headquarters in good spirits. The brigadier, accompanied by a young officer of his staff and three orderlies, had left camp at about noon to ride the twelve miles to General Broadwood's. Five o'clock and sunset came, and speedily the veldt was wrapped in African darkness, but the General did not return. Instead came a scout in from the veldt with the report that four hundred Boers had made a descent upon a farm between Broadwood's position and ours, past which we knew the General would ride on his way back to camp. Shortly afterwards two despatch-riders came up with a message and reported that they had been attacked at this farm and that two of them had been cut off and captured, the others escaping only through the fleetness of their horses and good luck in not being hit by the bullets sent after them. This naturally increased the anxiety that we had already begun to feel for the brigadier. The Chief of Staff sat down to compose a cipher message for heliographing across the veldt, asking if the General had started on his return ride; and the rest of us began to speculate on the consequences of the capture of such a prize by

the enemy. Two patrols had already been sent out with orders to fire on anything they saw in order, the reasoning was, that the wanderer might hear, and, if lost, locate his own camp; but they too had as yet failed to return. Then, just as we had about made up our minds that the worst had probably happened, the voice of the lost one was heard, and as we jumped to our feet he appeared in person within the dim radiance cast by the candles burning under the headquarters tent. An audible sigh of relief went up. "Did you see the enemy?" and "How did you get by?" were questions hurled at him from all sides. And then he told his story, and told it so well that we were soon shouting with laughter.

Just about sunset, as he was passing the farm in question, he had noticed a group of some twenty-five men in the distance. "I couldn't tell whether they were our fellows or Boers, but decided that it would be unwise to ride up and ask, and so we just offed it. Just as we turned our horses' heads they began shooting, and good shooting it was, too. One bullet struck between B—— here, and me. A second hit the ground between his horse's feet, and a third and fourth went singing over our heads. We were legging it very fast, but it was dark by this time, and after sending a few more shots after us they stopped firing. I don't know what became of one of my orderlies; he hasn't turned up yet. But B—— and I take a deal of catching."

The Brigadier, merrily telling of his sensations, speedily won his staff to his own mood. The jesting was at its height when one of his corps commanders came up with a grave face, saluted, and reported that one of his patrols had just come in with the news that a party of five horsemen had been seen at about sunset. The patrol had fired on them, but without effect ; and the horsemen when last seen had been going very fast to the eastward. " Yes," replied the Brigadier, " we were going rather fast." Then we burst out laughing again as the picture rose before us of the General, like young Lochinvar, galloping madly out of the west, and being fired at by his own patrols. Then he took his corps commander aside, for a kindly man was the Brigadier, and directed him to tell his men that it was all right, and that it had given him great satisfaction to note how well they shot. The Boers, he said, wouldn't have come half so near hitting him. The incident thus closed happily ; but it will be a long time before the telling of it stops ; and the members of that patrol will, it is safe to assume, tell it with bated breath, for it is no light matter to shoot your own General.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WOLF.

Thus the days passed, with everyone in the British camp expecting the enemy at every moment to make the attempt to get away, and with plans all made to meet it; but each succeeding morning brought us proofs that he was still "sitting tight," and each day closed without any relative change in our respective positions. On the third of August Lord Kitchener arrived at General Broadwood's camp and took over the command, and we began to hope that his presence would be the signal for greater activity on Lord Methuen's part and would result in the hurrying up of reinforcements from the south. Colonel Little and General Hart's brigade did join us, Colonel Otter and his Canadians were marching in from the railway, and Lord Kitchener sent over to General Ridley one of the lately arrived four-point-seven naval guns of Lady-smith fame; but the movements were still exasperatingly slow, and we stayed where we were for several days longer, maintaining the same unceasing watchfulness over the enemy's position, and sending occasional convoys back to the railway to keep us supplied with food and forage.

After a week, however, signs began to multiply that

our camp, which was not in an especially favored position, was becoming unhealthful, and General Ridley began to talk of shifting ground. With the passing away of the rigorous part of winter had come the first of the rains. On two nights it poured down in torrents, and we had had to forego dinner and take such shelter as we could find under canvas. To keep dry was a hard enough task for men, and an impossible one for beasts, which, of course, had no shelter at all. Result: dead mules. And dead mules to windward soon become disagreeable, and finally unbearable.

My own horses had so far, such had been my good fortune, survived both wet and cold, as well as the hard days of heavy trekking. But they, too, began to show signs of distress after the worst night: all, that is, but Wolf. Every experience of the campaign had given Wolf new opportunities to show how day by day he stored up wisdom to enable himself to meet the developments of the future. Wolf was a diminutive beast, somewhat stunted and clumsy of build, one would say; bay in color, with bare spots on his withers and hocks, and in the middle of his sturdy back, where the harness had chafed him. But even as Tommy Atkins, under his stained and ragged khaki, was like a Toledo blade of tempered steel in a rusty, tattered scabbard, so beneath Wolf's scarred skin beat a brave and faithful heart. The keen observer

would read the proofs in his beautifully shaped head and limbs, and in the poise of his body. But plain to all was it in the way he held up his head and stumpy tail, and pricked up his ears when you came up to greet him, or put his nose in your hand to search for oats. Wolf never drooped his head.

At the end of a long day's march, which he had spent in doing more than his share of work in pulling half a ton over all sorts of country, he did not lose interest in what was going on, nor fail to take note of the place where some native boy had hidden a bag of oats or a pail of mealies. And he never resented your caresses, though he took them very calmly, as if they were a foolish tribute to a horse that had only done his duty. And not only did Wolf do his duty manfully, modestly, and to the uttermost of his faithful soul, but he never neglected to show his companion on the other side of the desselboom the way that he should go. Many companions had he had, for I never found one who could stand up beside him for very long; but he tackled each new-comer with the same good-natured patience, and made a wiser horse of him before the latter gave out. At Wolvehoek, where I secured rail transport to Heilbron on my way to join Lord Methuen, Wolf showed the way into the box-car to five other horses and mules that for an hour had resisted blandishments and threats alike of an army of blacks and Tommies, distracted

railway officials, and desperate drivers. In an inspired moment we led Wolf up to the open door, while the other animals drew back at gaze. Wolf sniffed into the car, saw other horses standing inside in peace and comfort, made a final examination of the entrance, and leaped in. The others, led up, followed him without a protest, and as if ashamed. And at the end of that jolting journey, which had given most of us mere men all we could do to keep from being hurled out; Wolf, when his door was opened, jumped nimbly down to earth again and surveyed his new surroundings with the keenest interest, displayed in his pricked-up ears and arched neck. When turned out to graze, Wolf was always coupled to the least tractable of my other animals. He never failed to keep him near the herd, where the veldt grass was richest, and always brought him back safe to his peg-rope by the cart (and the oats) at evening.

My black boy Lewis stuck his head into my tent one evening as we lay outside Vredefort, and as he laid away some clothes he had been washing, with a warning that they would get dusty if left outside in the wind, he said: "Wolf been away all day, sir. I look for him all over er veldt, sir. He slip his halter and go away, and I not find him. Den I come back wid er odder horses, and dere he is by er cart, eatin' mealies he fin' in er bag." And he wound up his tale with a chuckle. Wolf had no more appreciative ad-

mirer than Lewis. Having been originally a Boer pony before he was duly enrolled in the Kimberley Mounted Corps, he did not know much kindness in his early youth. Now he accepted it as he accepted everything else : as something all in the day's work, but that must not be allowed to interfere with his duty. I think he was grateful in his own superior way ; but it pained me to realize that when it was all over he would not be half so sorry to change masters as I should be to part with him.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BOER ON HIS OWN HEATH.

Such incidents as these which marked those days on the Vaal, and the encounters we had had with De Wet since leaving Bethlehem, had served to bring out most of the points which characterize the Boer. Among other opinions more or less sincerely held, outside of Africa, concerning the Boers, is the opinion that they are a sturdy, simple, generally worthy if not noble race; in short, that they are still what they were when they emigrated from Holland, that cradle of so many heroes and dauntless pioneers; or what they were even later, at the time of the Great Trek, when they went forth into the wilderness to conquer for themselves peace, prosperity, and happy homes. But those who cling to this opinion have failed to take account of the influences that have been at work upon the Boer character during the last two generations.

These influences have been both climatic and social. There is something particularly insidious about life in the wilder portions of South Africa. If man is content with little, he may obtain it at the price of comparatively little labor. When the Boers first penetrated into the wilderness of the high veldt,

which later became the territories of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, they found a country teeming with game of many varieties, and possessing a soil of singular fertility, which responded generously to the simplest forms of cultivation. By the simple process of throwing a dam across a stream, the Boer voortrekker found that he could preserve a supply of water which would outlast the dry season of winter; and the veldt, without any care at all, provided sustenance amply sufficient for his flocks and herds. Thus nature herself, with but the slightest propitiation, offered enough to keep body and soul together, an object which a singularly bracing and healthful climate reduced to still less of a struggle.

But nature went no further than to provide of itself for the humblest wants. If man desired to live on a higher plane, if he craved even the comforts of life as they are understood in older countries, he must work for it as he had to work for it in Australia, or in innumerable portions of the western United States, or, to go back further still, in the far less genial surroundings that the Puritan emigrants transformed into the New England of to-day. And so it happened, very early in the national existence of the Boers, that they were faced with the alternatives of accepting practically as a free gift the plain fare and rude shelter which sufficed to satisfy the humblest wants, or of aiming at a worthier level of existence, and, by

exercising those higher qualities which distinguish man from brute beasts, winning for themselves the possessions which are the reward of hard and honest toil almost the world over.

In seeking to explain why the Boer, sprung from a race that has accomplished so much that is worth doing, and that has left so many inspiring examples of daring and success in every field of human endeavor, should have been content to choose the former of the alternatives outlined above, one must take note of many circumstances. All about him the Boer found food in the form of vast herds of game, so primitive as never to think of running away from a man with a rifle, and procurable in any quantity for the mere cost of powder and shot. Again, before their ancient virility and strength of character had been impaired, they found it comparatively easy to subdue the various native tribes whom they found in possession of the lands they trekked to; and thus, in a primeval country, where the conquered were always slaves, they obtained labor in abundance, which could be put to use for no more trouble than the wielding of a sjambok. And, as another subtle invitation to sloth, the vastness of the new country they had found their way into led them to scatter widely apart in small communities, a circumstance which in its turn reduced the demand for labor to the small amount necessary to supply the simple needs of

isolated families, each sufficient to itself, and maintaining only the most casual relations with the others, the nearest of which was often several days' journey away across the trackless veldt. Thus the tendency inevitably was, after the natives in the surrounding district had been subjugated, for the Boer to withdraw himself with his family to some isolated spot which he could call his own, and there settle down to a pastoral life, which was rarely interrupted by the visit of a traveller, and into which the demands of neighborliness entered but little if at all. The Englishman who fares forth to seek his fortune in the colonies, cherishes almost invariably the purpose to return when he has met with success, and enjoy the fruits of his industry at home. The Boer had no such incentive to accumulate wealth. His hut on the veldt was all the home he wanted; in those early days wealth meant nothing to him, for there were no markets about him that offered him anything to buy.

In some respects this would doubtless appear to be an ideal life. It is what many schools of thought have sought to persuade us is the life that offers the highest form of peace and happiness realizable here below. But there is a flaw in the theory somewhere, if the experience of the Boers counts for anything.

Their early history will show that the Boers did not yield at once to the enervating allurements of the

sweetness of doing nothing. The fine, firm fibre which they inherited from their forefathers at first resisted the influences of decay, as is shown in the records of such men as Brand, early President of the Orange Free State, and Pretorius, after whom Pretoria is named, both of whom left little undone in the attempt to weld the Boers into a nation. Even as recently as the period of the present war a goodly number of the Boers of the Free State, and a few of the Transvaal, have shown that they have not lost all their mettle : Christian De Wet, Prinsloo, and Botha are, as was also the venerated Joubert, not lacking in most of the fine qualities that were once national and not merely individual characteristics. But the Boers as a whole, especially those of the Transvaal, and most markedly under the regime of Paul Krueger, have become hopelessly degenerate. Declining to accept nature's friendly challenge to a trial of wits and strength, which might have served to keep the edge on their faculties, they have proved unable to withstand the contact with the black races : miscegenation has sapped their physical powers : leprosy has set its awful brand on many families : the discovery of gold has helped to corrupt their morals : and finally, political ambition, coming after they had as a nation lost the force to govern it or to achieve it, has hurried on a ruin which, inevitable, and, by the stern laws of nature, just though it is, is none the

less pitiful to contemplate when one recalls what the race once was.

No one can have failed to note that there is a great difference of opinion (outside of Africa) as to the Boers: their characteristics, their habits, their rights and wrongs, even as to their actual deeds in certain battles and certain negotiations. One noteworthy thing about this difference of opinion is that it increases in direct ratio to the distance of the disputants from South Africa. There, among those Englishmen and Americans who have lived with the Boer on his own heath, who have done business with him, who know from actual experience what his laws are, and who have fought against him—among these, who are certainly the best informed, there are hardly two opinions. The pro-Boer sentiment which exists, or did exist (for it is already subsiding), outside of South Africa—ignoring, of course, those individuals who are pro-Boers by contract with Oom Paul, or for other reasons equally unsentimental and insincere—it was early possible to trace to one of three general causes: consanguinity, which moved the Dutch in Holland and elsewhere; dislike of England, which influenced numbers of European States and communities, and a small element of the American people; and misinformation, of the sort which Oom Paul and his agents have always been such adepts at disseminating, and which created an honest be-

lief in many generous hearts that the Boer governments were republics fashioned after Washington's high type; that the Boers themselves, valiant, holy, and heroic stalwarts, were worthy successors of Cromwell's Ironsides; and that the present war was forced upon them by England in the determination to satisfy rapacious greed for land and gold.

It is unnecessary to do more than refer to the sympathy for the Boers which is founded upon consanguinity and upon Anglophobia. The former modified itself perceptibly upon closer acquaintance by the cleanly and upright subjects of Queen Wilhelmina with the corporeal presence of Oom Paul; and the latter will continue to be lavished until some other pigmy rises up and announces his purpose to drive the English into the sea. But the pro-Boer sentiment which is founded upon misinformation is honest in the main, and therefore merits some attention.

Contributing to this sentiment is belief in the fiction that Paul Krueger was the President of a Republic, as the term is understood in the United States, in fact as well as in name. For proofs irrefutable that the so-called South African Republic was an oligarchy ruled by a clique which in its turn was dominated by Krueger, who had found seventeen years as Chief Executive ample time in which to arrogate to himself despotic power, the seeker after light cannot do better than turn to a book called

"The Transvaal from Within," written by a gentleman who lived for many years among the Boers. Therein is set forth the evidence of facts, supported by authentic documents, which reveal the full measure of the autocratic power wielded by Oom Paul, the corrupt methods whereby he wrung from those who desired to do business in his country the sums which went to make up his present handsome fortune, and the way he used his wealth and his power to further his own ends. Oom Paul undoubtedly loved his burghers after a fashion, and had many excellent qualities : but honesty, to say nothing of candor, was not one of them, and neither, most assuredly, was humility, of the kind which the Boers read about in their pocket Bibles. He had a strange prejudice against allowing his burghers to acquire much general knowledge : and his patriotism took the not lofty form of a belief that what was best for him was best for his country. The Transvaal was not a republic ; and Oom Paul was simply a shrewd and obstinate old man, with a great deal of ambition and covetousness and not quite so much good sense.

As to the causes of the war, every person of information in South Africa knows, and not even the Dutch of Cape Colony have thought it worth while to deny, that the war was England's answer to the announced determination of the Boers, and the Dutch generally, to drive the British into the sea. Before

the real facts of the *ante-bellum* situation began to transpire, it was a popular impression, in England as well as in the United States, that inability to agree upon the manner of granting the franchise to the Uitlanders was the chief cause of the war. Lord Salisbury's government made no serious effort to counteract that impression. But, as a matter of fact, the franchise dispute was the most trifling of side issues. A member of Parliament whom I met at the front, in the uniform of an officer of the staff, put it even more strongly than that. He had sought a commission in the army with the object of gaining information in the field which he could not have obtained at home. He told me that he had been one of a group of Conservative members who had on a certain occasion presented a memorial to the Premier, begging that the franchise question might not be allowed to lead to war. "I came out here," he added, "to find that the franchise question had nothing to do with the war."

But a few facts about this franchise dispute will not come in amiss. Much has been made in some quarters of the alleged fairness of Krueger's franchise proposals; and it used to be charged that Secretary Chamberlain split hairs with him in a way that revealed his own determination to force a war. As a matter of fact, there was nothing fair about the wily Boer's proposals; he merely acted upon his

favorite policy of trying to get something for nothing, one of his methods being a display of that slimness which consists in persuading your neighbor that you are telling the truth when you're not, and that you will keep your word when you engage it. Oom Paul did say that after a residence of a certain comparatively brief number of years in the Transvaal, the Uitlander might be held to have satisfied one of the conditions of admission to citizenship. But he took pains so to hedge this apparent concession about as to render it of no value whatever. No Uitlander's claims to citizenship were to be considered even after the condition of residence had been fulfilled until a majority of the man's Boer neighbors had united in a recommendation that he be granted the franchise. Such a recommendation, the difficulty of obtaining which in a hostile community need not be dwelt upon, would bring the Uitlander's case before the Volksraad, or Congress, which in its turn would pass an independent and presumably equally partial verdict upon the candidate's qualifications. And, finally, the grant, even if confirmed by the Volksraad, was still to be invalid unless the Executive Council, in which Krueger's word was law, approved. And from that final decision there could be no appeal. Such was the nature of the "concessions" in praise of which I have heard some pro-Boers argue themselves quite out of patience.

No ; the war was the inevitable result of the Dutch conspiracy, which had for many years been taking shape, to strip England of her South African colonies and make South Africa Dutch from the Zambesi to the Cape. Audacious as it seems, it was a conspiracy that might have succeeded ; many colonials have told me that it undoubtedly would have succeeded had the Home Government trifled much longer with the feelings of the colonials, and had Krueger had a few months more in which to complete his plans. In that contingency, they told me, the Dutch in Cape Colony would have risen to a man ; and many Englishmen, in despair of getting a hearing at home, would have joined them to welcome the Boer commandoes to Cape Town. But that far-seeing statesman, Sir Alfred Milner, of whom it will in time be written that the British Empire owes him much, and South Africa everything, read the true meaning of this heavy importation of piano-cases into the Transvaal, which he traced back to a period long antedating the blundering Jameson raid, fathomed the purposes of the Afrikander Bond, Krueger's formidable ally in Cape Colony and Natal, and warned the Government at home in time. That first army corps was despatched to South Africa ; and Krueger, finding the cat out of the bag, perforce declared war, and started his burghers across his frontiers towards the sea, too soon to suit his full purpose, but with better chances

than if he had waited until the Army Corps arrived. How his levies failed to get there is now history, the details of which will make it eventually clear that two reasons for their failure were bad strategy in sitting down before Ladysmith, and Kimberley, and Mafeking, and lack of sufficient courage and dash to press home their attacks against any of these towns, which depended for their defence hardly at all upon natural position but almost entirely upon the indomitable spirit of the officers and men behind the guns. Even thus early in the war did the Boers prove their lack of stomach for assaults, or for any manœuvres which exposed them to fire in the open.

Many people have doubtless wondered how it was that the Boers committed the folly of matching themselves against a power of England's resources, and much has been made of the resolution necessary to send a people numbering forty thousand fighting men against a nation that could put 200,000 in the field. The explanation does not properly recall the courage of David going forth against Goliath. As a matter of fact, the majority of the Boers, who, it must be remembered, are an extremely ignorant and ill-informed people in the mass, had no idea that England could send such an army to South Africa and keep it there. Long before the war broke out, the emissaries of Krueger and Steyn began their campaign of cajolery. England, they told the credulous

burghers, could not possibly, such was her situation as regarded the rest of the world, send more than 70,000 men against the innumerable points that the Boers could hold. Many Free Staters took up arms, so they have told me themselves, in the firm belief that 20,000 men were the maximum force they would have to oppose; and that the Dutch would at once rise in Cape Colony and clear the way for the Boer armies to Cape Town. Not even much moral courage is required to undertake an invasion so simple as that. And yet while Krueger thus deceived his burghers into beginning the war, and cajoled them with more lies into keeping at it long after they had nothing left to fight for, he allowed himself in turn to be deceived by the Bond agents, who assured him that the Dutch in Cape Colony were ready to take up arms for him; and by Dr. Leyds, able chief of that marvelous subornation factory in Brussels, who convinced Krueger that most of the powers in Europe would leap to his assistance so soon as he should have won a few successes.

This habit of lying dominates the Boer's national and private life. He has no sense of honor as we understand it. To him a lie is not a cowardly thing, but a legitimate means of trying to get the better of the other fellow. Men who have done business with him will tell you how foolish it is to trust the average Boer. And in warfare most of them practise these

same qualities of slimmess, as they call it. The English at the front have, as a rule, glossed over the incidents illustrative of this fact: it is a quality of the race to be generous to a foe, and I heard few complaints among officers or men of the British army against the abuse of the white and Red Cross flags, for instance, while several have sought to explain it on the ground that the men who shot from under it didn't see it raised by their comrades. But a neutral is not bound by any such delicacy of feeling. Time and again the Boers, sometimes on the field of battle, but more often from behind the walls of an isolated farmhouse, did what men of courage in our sense of the word would never do: raised the white flag for the deliberate purpose of getting their enemy to expose himself to one more volley before the Boers ran away.

Not all, perhaps not half, the Boers would resort to such treachery. But whereas the white flag was thus used fifty times among the forty thousand Boers who took up arms, it was not once abused among Lord Roberts's two hundred thousand.

Another cowardly trick sanctioned even by De Wet, chivalrous foe as he showed himself in most respects to be, was the dressing by Boers in British khaki and helmets, and using the disguise to surprise an unsuspecting picket or to entice small scouting parties within easier rifle range. This, too, was con-

sidered only slim. A Boer farmer came into General Ridley's camp on the Vaal one morning. As he produced a pass and a guarantee that he had taken the oath of neutrality, he was treated courteously and invited to share with us our bully beef, cold duck, hard tack, and whiskey. Among other things, we asked him if he approved of this Boer habit of wearing the British uniform in the field. He thought it was all right, he said. And this man was a typical Boer, as far as my experience has gone. I have seen others cleaner and less unpleasant to look upon, but he was of the prevailing type: in habits and in morals uncouth, unkempt, and unclean. He was tall and well-built, with an uncared-for, reddish beard, and small, shifty, close-set, dark eyes. He wore a collarless linen shirt, which he had evidently not taken off for some weeks. His outside garments were a coat and trousers of dingy tweed. He came into camp ostensibly to complain of the driving off of some of his sheep by General Ridley's troops. But his hands trembled so as he used them at the meal; he had such poor control of his voice; and his demeanor generally was so much the opposite of frank, that General Ridley sized him up for what he undoubtedly was, a spy, put him under guard, and when the next convoy left camp, sent him to the railway consigned to Cape Town.

So much information had been obtained in this

fashion by Boer spies who produced evidences of being honorable men that General Ridley, holding the weakest portion of General Broadwood's thin line against twice his number of Boers, proposed to take no such chances, and with all the cheerfulness in the world sent down in a similar manner every Boer, pass or no pass, who came into the camp. No charge was ever filed against them; they were simply left to understand that the British had lost some of their early simplicity and had learned something of Boer traits. Once satisfied from the man's looks that he was a spy, any excuse, or none at all, served for making the Boer a prisoner of war.

On another occasion an ill-favored farmer came strolling up to headquarters, asking for the General, to complain about some stolen sheep. This was a favorite method of spies for getting past the outposts. As General Ridley put it, in telling us of this particular case, "Their excuse for coming is that 368 sheep have been stolen by my scouts. The number heretofore has never varied: it has always been 368. But this man's figure was 72. A Boer who is fool enough to say 72 when he might just as truthfully say 368 should not in his own interests be left at large." If other British Generals had acted with that same cheery firmness which distinguished this Brigadier, fewer convoys would have been ambushed

and fewer "regrettable incidents" would have been chronicled in the London papers.

It is also just as well, in the interests of truth, to state that the Boers as a people are no longer distinguished for bravery. Decay has sapped their valor together with the rest of their ancient virtue. Most observant people must have noticed that their tactics do not call for much courage. They shoot from behind almost perfect cover, and the moment the imperviousness of that cover is threatened, they are off to fight another day. They display dash only in running away. They did not run quite so soon during the early campaigns in Natal; they had a better country to defend, and their opinion of the quality of the British soldier, as a result of Gladstone's scuttle policy after Majuba and of the pitiful collapse of the Johannesburg Reform Committee's plans, was not what it now is. But they stood up against Lord Roberts nowhere between Paardeburg and Pretoria, abandoned the latter stronghold almost without a struggle, and in fact since Cronje surrendered attacked only when strong in the ratio of ten to one, and made a defense only from positions which it was an absolute impossibility for the force opposed to them to carry. Organized resistance to the conquest of the Free State and the Transvaal ended with Paardeburg. Since then the Transvaalers, the most decadent of all the Boers, have done practically no

fighting at all; and what success has been achieved in the way of harassing Lord Roberts's flanks and rear has been accomplished by De Wet and his Free Staters.

It would be unfair to say or to let it be inferred that the Boers are a race of cowards. Cowardice in men is one of the rarest of human faults. But the Boers are by no means the Paladins that some people would have us believe; and man to man, and by the test of battle, they are far below the level of Tommy Atkins. "Then how is it," many people will exclaim, "that the Boers inflicted such heavy losses on the British, and made such a showing early in the war?" The reason is two-fold: the Boers never fought save with an overwhelming advantage of position; and they had for some of their best allies in many of those earlier battles of the war a number of British officers who were less fit to command men in battle than they were to wield the long whip of a Kaffir bullock-driver.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LESSONS OF THE CHASE.

On Sunday, August 5, by which time our patience was almost exhausted, Lord Kitchener decided that the time was at last ripe for closing in on De Wet ; and that morning, by his orders, General Ridley sent Colonels Legge and De Lisle to the northeast to join the Canadians on Wildehonde Kop and to get in touch with General Knox, who had on the previous evening driven a small party of Boers off Groot Eiland Kop and occupied that important position, which commanded the Vaal for several miles and also dominated the towns of Vredefort and Parys. Meanwhile, General Broadwood had seized Rhebokfontein without opposition, incidentally capturing five of the enemy's wagons. Early on Monday morning General Ridley also struck camp with the remainder of his force : and towards noon we joined Legge and De Lisle, and took up a fine position between and around Wildehonde and Groot Eiland Kops. From the latter both Vredefort and Parys were plainly visible, and the scene below us was picturesque to a degree. The Vaal, winding between thickly-wooded banks, lay below us : and beyond it, and also on the hither side towards Vredefort, rose stately peaks and mountains,

with one gorge which they sheltered, leading to the Boer position, plainly visible, and also another from which the gleaming river issued on its way to the distant sea. The road which the Boers would have to follow if they attempted to escape to the eastward lay below under our guns; and a splendid view of a large extent of country which we all felt might become a battlefield was to be obtained from Groot Eiland's commanding summit.

General Ridley chose for his headquarters a site at the foot of Wildehonde Kop, a stony eminence dotted with cedars, with plenty of good water near by: a spot in every way superior to that wherein we had spent the previous weary fortnight. Here we prepared to settle down for another week, until the arrival of Generals Paget and Clements, who were due at Kroonstad on the 11th, should enable Lord Kitchener to tighten his grip still further.

But DeWet was not the man to sit quietly down and suffer himself to be surrounded. While we had been waiting, inactive, for the coming of our slow-moving reinforcements, the Boer had replaced his worn-out animals and reprovisioned his force with supplies gleaned from the surrounding country; and by the time we moved up and closed his last outlet to the south of the Vaal, he was ready to resume his march forward. By this time Lord Methuen should have been able on his part to close all means of egress to

the north. But for reasons which yet remain to be explained, he had never moved his force down quite close enough to the Vaal. De Wet found two drifts, De Wet's and Schueman's, capable of being forced with a little strategy: and on the night of August 6 he made a feint at one and, taking his whole force across the other, got safely around Lord Methuen's front. Heavy and regular firing, which began at dawn on the 7th and lasted until two o'clock in the afternoon, gave us in General Ridley's camp our first intimation that all the good work that he and General Broadwood had accomplished was undone. Later we learned that the whole Boer force had got safely away, the firing we had heard being between Methuen and De Wet's rear guard, and accomplishing nothing, and that the enemy was now trekking fast to the eastward along the north bank of the Vaal, whether with the purpose of turning south and recrossing at Lindeque's or Viljoen's Drift into the Orange River Colony or of going northwards towards Johannesburg and Pretoria, no one knew. Towards dusk, however, one of General Ridley's officers returned from a scouting expedition and reported the main force of the enemy at Buffels-hoek, between Potchefstroom and Parys. That indicated that he had chosen the former course, and also removed the last doubts that he had got clean away.

It would be only tiresome to go at length into the story of the resumption of the chase by Lord Kit-

chener. The latter vowed to catch De Wet this time if he had to kill every mule in the British forces, and he started off on the trail again at a pace which looked ominous for the mules. At noon on Thursday the force reached Lindeque's Drift in time to frustrate any attempt on the part of the Boers to recross there. But they had no intention of doing so. That afternoon I climbed to the top of a high kop with General Ridley and his staff and signallers, and thence for over three hours we watched the whole Boer force trekking off to the northward, safely out of range, while Lord Methuen dropped ineffectual shells into his rear guard.

Next morning I crossed the Vaal for the third time ; and then followed two days of hard marching up to and across the Gatsrand to the railway at Waverdiend, between Potchefstroom and Johannesburg. Lord Methuen, some ten miles to our left, managed to keep in touch with the enemy's rear-guard for most of the time, but Lord Kitchener's immediate force didn't have a chance to fire a gun. De Wet kept his lead, and a few days later joined Delarey not far from Johannesburg. By this time most of Lord Kitchener's mules were dead ; but De Wet was still at large, and possessed of renewed resources that enabled him to go on roaming at will over South Africa, cutting lines of communication, swooping down on detached forces and posts, and generally

conducting the most spectacular guerrilla warfare that modern times have seen. The chase had ended in a fizzle.

But it had not been without its lessons. In a month, with a force which was originally 1,500, and which swelled to 3,000, with a dozen guns and a convoy of over a hundred bullock-wagons and Cape carts, forming a column several miles long, De Wet had marched 250 miles across country, from the Basutoland border, across the Vaal, and nearly to Pretoria. With two of the keenest of the British generals on his heels throughout the march, and with Lord Kitchener himself directing the last part of the chase, he kept his lead until he was weary, and held his pursuers at bay for two weeks while he rested in the hills along the Vaal; successfully threaded his way among several large bodies of troops on the lookout for him, crossed Lord Roberts's lines of communication twice, cutting them in both cases, captured two train-loads of soldiers and supplies, and finally joined Delarey in the Transvaal 250 miles from his starting point.

This extraordinary march of De Wet's tells in miniature the story of all the British disasters in this war. Perhaps no other single incident reveals so clearly the handicaps under which the army in South Africa worked from the first. De Wet should not have achieved this brilliant success. Making every

allowance for his own resourcefulness, which was remarkable, and for his knowledge of the country, which was perfect, the fact remains that his march was not so much a credit to his own unusual ability as a reflection upon the incapacity of a few of the British generals still in the field.

It is perhaps natural in Europe and America, where at best but an imperfect idea of the conditions in South Africa may be formed, that in seeking to explain the disasters of the British, the Boers should be credited with extraordinary fighting abilities. It is doubtless some consolation for the English and for those who sympathize with them to think that when they have failed to press their attacks home or have been outgeneralled or baffled it is because they have faced an always worthy foeman, who fought with splendid valor, born of ardent, if misguided patriotism. But in such reflections one only deludes himself. Indulging in them, one fails to do justice to the unconquerable heroism of the rank and file of Lord Roberts's army, and one is more than generous to the Boers. The story of every battle, every skirmish, of this war will show that the Boers are not brave in the soldier's sense of the word; are skillful in a military sense only in their remarkable aptitude for taking advantage of the blunders of their opponents, which have been, verily, most generously distributed. The Boer fights determinedly only when in greatly

superior force, when seeking to extricate himself from a desperate situation, or when snugly entrenched behind well-nigh perfect cover, which he knows so well how to find. The Boer always has one eye on his line of retreat, and he is on his pony and away the moment his inability to hold his position becomes, not necessarily certain, but simply possible. He sells his life dearly only when cornered, wherein he is no braver than the most timid of animals. It may be exaggeration to say, as many have said, that every British disaster in the war may be traced to the incompetency of some British commander. But it is true beyond question that many disasters may be traced to that source; and it is equally true that many victories, won in spite of bad generalship, would have been disasters if Tommy Atkins were not the well-nigh unconquerable and incomparable fighter that he is.

The record of Lord Roberts's advance to Pretoria is evidence enough on these points. The Boers scattered before his columns like chaff before the wind. Earlier successes against other commanders, and De Wet's achievements since impregnable Pretoria fell practically without a struggle, were made possible by blunders which Lord Roberts, or Sir Archibald Hunter, or any other able General, would not have made. But so extensive was the hostile territory in South Africa that had to be covered to

be made secure against constant raids by an extraordinarily mobile enemy, that two conditions increasing the possibility of disaster were created: a force even two hundred thousand strong had to be divided up, after the main campaign conducted by Lord Roberts was over, into innumerable comparatively small bodies: and every commander had to trust a part of his effective force to some incompetent subordinate. Hunter had his Hart and his Barton and his Paget: Buller, and after him Kitchener, had his Methuen. And one might add many others to the list.

Christian De Wet should not have got away through Slabbert's Nek practically scatheless, as he did. The blame for his escape is to be divided between Generals Paget and Clements: how and why will come out in due course. It is true that General Hunter, hampered as he was by the difficulty of getting supplies into Bethlehem, had not time to draw his cordon about De Wet quite so tightly as he wished. But his forces and his resources were sufficient, if all his subordinates had properly co-operated with him, to main De Wet seriously before he could break free. Had Clements and Paget been worthy of the reliance which General Hunter had to place upon them, De Wet would have had but a ragged remnant with which to re-inforce his Transvaal allies.

Once through the cordon, with all of South Africa

before him, De Wet found ample means to keep ahead of his pursuers. One of the most important factors that have contributed to the successes of the Boers has been their superior mobility. Subsisting as they do on the scantiest fare, able to live for days together on a piece of biltong which adds practically no weight at all to their equipment, the necessity for transport is materially lessened to little more than what is sufficient for the ammunition needed in the field. Again, they have the best horses and the best trek-oxen, which they can pick out at a glance from among the herds on the farms through which they pass, and which the white inhabitants are only too glad to give up, to replace such other animals as have broken down. The native horses and oxen have learned to live on the veldt grass and such simple forage as the country provides, so that the problem of obtaining food for both man and beast is a much simpler one than that which has confronted the British, forced to rely principally on imported and unacclimated animals, which do not thrive on the food-stuffs of the country, and which in addition are required to carry much more weight than the lightly-equipped Boer horseman straps to his saddle. Finally, the Boers never failed to take advantage of the fact that bullocks trek best at night, and will not feed between sunset and sunrise. Knowing the roads and the country as perfectly as they did, they consequently did their marching at

night, and thus were enabled to turn their animals out to graze during the heat of the day. Naturally, therefore, their animals were under normal conditions much more fit for the work they had to do : whereas the British, often ignorant of the country through which they were moving, did most of their marching by daylight, seldom halting before dark, and thus often denied their draught animals the opportunity to obtain their sorely-needed nourishment.

Under these circumstances, and with the added advantage that almost every one of his burghers had an extra horse with the convoy, De Wet seldom failed to cover twenty-five miles a day to his pursuers' twenty. This rendered pursuit futile unless his progress could be impeded from in front : and it was the difficulty of throwing troops across his ever-changing course that gave the authorities at headquarters their chief trouble in seeking to hem in the agile Boer. The British would learn his direction and station a column across his path, only to find out later that De Wet's watchful and extraordinarily efficient scouts had given ample warning to enable their commander so to change his direction as to make necessary a new disposition of the forces seeking to check him. And it generally happened that before precise information of the Boer change of front had been obtained, De Wet had slipped by, and left in his rear the British force that a few days or a few hours be-

fore had been in front. Everyone who has attended a football game in America has seen similar tactics employed by a swift sprinter running with the ball behind good interference, and threading his way through the opposing eleven towards the latter's goal.

Thus it was that De Wet, after getting across the Vaal on August 7 and successfully slipping past Lord Methuen, was never again in danger of being stopped before he made his conjunction with Delarey. The time he had spent in resting and replacing his animals and securing fresh supplies from friendly farms and towns in his neighborhood had repaired his forces; whereas Broadwood's and Ridley's transport had suffered seriously, owing to the unhealthfulness of the camp where we had spent those two profitless weeks and to the necessity of sending constant convoys back to the railway. Lord Methuen hung on to De Wet's rear guard with a persistency which if earlier displayed might have borne fruit; and Lord Kitchener, relentlessly forcing on his mules and bullocks at a killing pace, followed hot and fast on De Wet's trail and tried by every means to overcome his latest lead. But it was a hopeless task, and the result was inevitable. De Wet joined Delarey not far from Johannesburg, and went on roaming over his happy hunting grounds at his own sweet will.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HOME TRAIL.

It was evident by the time we reached Welverdiend, on the railway between Potchefstroom and Johannesburg, that De Wet could not be caught by Lord Kitchener's force. The war had now lost the dramatic interest which it formerly possessed: I was satisfied that it was over from the standpoint of a special war correspondent: and so I decided to take the chance which the railway offered me to proceed to Johannesburg and thence to Cape Town and home. General Ridley approved my decision: and on Sunday morning, the twelfth of August, I took my farewell of that gallant and tireless brigadier—as fine a type of the officer and the gentleman as you will find in any army—and started back from the front.

I was back in Johannesburg again on Monday morning, having made the journey in an open truck with a dozen officers of the C. I. V's. for companions, with my Cape cart in another truck behind, and Wolf and his comrades in a box-car ahead. Next day I sold my outfit for a fair price, keeping only Wolf, which faithful beast I presented to Lewis: and at two o'clock that afternoon he and I proceeded to the Park Station to await the train for Elandsfontein, the

junction of the main line with the Johannesburg branch, where we were to connect with the train for the Cape.

There was little bustle at the station on that day, and not many waiting passengers on the platform: one or two officers, half a dozen Tommies, a group of "undesirable" Hollanders, evidently under sentence of banishment, and a dozen or so negroes, comprised the gathering. The officers wore the bored look that I had become familiar with in that country; Tommy was careless and happy-go-lucky as usual; the Hollanders and the negroes looked anxious.

A hospital train drew in just before ours was due. One or two invalids were carried out, and during their removal we heard another from within cry out wildly, in the voice of delirium, "Another man gone!" He was hushed by a comrade, and a moment later the train pulled out. Soon afterwards a shrill whistle warned us of the approach of our own train. Quickly it appeared, rounding the curve from the main station; and glided swiftly up to the platform with that ease and smoothness characteristic of the light English rolling-stock. There were only open coal-trucks behind the diminutive and gentle-looking engine. Into these we all clambered, hauling our belongings in after us, officers and Tommies in khaki, Hollanders in sombre black, negroes in anything that would serve to cover them; and five minutes later, with a shrill

shriek from the engine, we were off for Elandsfontein.

Elandsfontein is but a short distance from Johannesburg; we were there in thirty minutes. At this important junction, where the railway lines from Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Natal all converge, the scene was one of indescribable crowding and bustle, and vastly more impressive than that at the railway station in Cape Town when I had left there fifteen weeks before. Since then the front had been pushed up to beyond Pretoria, and the tracks, clustering like the filaments of a mighty web around the little station platform, were closely packed with supply-trains, troop-trains, and trucks jammed with every imaginable collection of things, from a brigade of infantry to a train-load of Army Service Corps boxes. The platform in its turn was a seething mass of humanity, mostly composed, of course, of troops in khaki, but containing also a sprinkling of civilians. Among them the railway staff officer threaded his way on his ceaseless round of petty duties, answering questions when they were not too foolish or when he was caught for a moment in the press, but generally waving people off and pushing on in search of carriages and trucks which it was a constant marvel that he ever found. Every few moments he would raise his hand, and a train would glide swiftly out of the station, generally carrying a regiment of soldiers to

the front, who from where they sat on boxes of supplies or lay stretched out on tarpaulins covering the truck-loads of other boxes, harness, or great guns with grim, khaki-painted muzzles protruding over the next truck, called out a cheery farewell as they were whirled by. One train once out, another came in instantly to occupy the empty track, and discharge more soldiers or supplies.

I was watching all this turmoil, engrossed in the busy scene, when suddenly the sound of cheering in a high treble key caught my ears. I turned to see a train of gaily decorated and crowded trucks come sweeping in from Johannesburg. Two huge *vierkleurs*, the proscribed Transvaal flag, formed the main decorations, draped over the sides of the two centre trucks. Standing and sitting in these was a crowd of Boer women and children, gaily decked out in such striking combinations of their national colors as might be expected to prove annoying to their foes and captors. One woman held over her head a monstrous umbrella covered with strips of the red, white, green, and yellow; and everywhere in endless repetition were flaunted the same colors. We quickly learned that these were women being taken to the Boer laagers outside Pretoria, to be turned over to their husbands and fathers, whom they, while in Johannesburg and other towns held by the British, had been furnishing with valuable information. As their train drew in,

they flung at the troops around them all the taunts they could lay tongue to : but five minutes later each truck was surrounded by cheerful Tommies : and Boer and Briton, in accordance with the immutable laws of sex, were gaily chatting and jesting, and generally making merry, only a few surly ones refusing to succumb to Tommy's blandishments.

But there was little time left us to enjoy such an entertaining sight. Without any warning the train from Pretoria for which we had been waiting suddenly drew in, and at once there began a mad rush for places. There were only a couple of carriages among the trucks, and seats in the former were precious. A few officers, two or three women, and myself, were fortunate enough to secure these : the rest of the human tide surged into the trucks. There was little delay. At four o'clock the train pulled out again, and the journey to the Cape was safely begun.

The activity of the enemy was such that it was unsafe for trains to proceed after dark north of Bloemfontein. The first night we spent at Viljoen's Drift, on the other side of the Vaal. Our progress was slow all the way down, as we had to wait at nearly every siding to allow trains carrying troops, guns, horses, and supplies to go by. We reached Kroonstad at two o'clock on the following afternoon, but there learned that our train would not be allowed to go on until next morning. This promised a weary

period of waiting : but there were several officers on board who proved congenial companions, and the time passed pleasantly enough. A few of the officers on the train, invalided from the front, looked broken-down and dejected : but the others had known the joy and profit that comes from the crowded hour of glorious life, as one read in one clear glance of eyes that had grown alert and watchful during weeks of looking over the veldt, searching the distant horizon for some trace of the foe, and in the elastic tread of men who for months had been close to earth and nature, and were hardened into the very perfection of physical health and strength.

The next evening, the third since we left Johannesburg, we reached peaceful Bloemfontein. We rested there but a few hours, and thence continued our journey unbroken to Cape Town, where we duly arrived early on Sunday morning, I having put Lewis on the train for Kimberley at De Aar. At the Mount Nelson hotel in Cape Town I doffed my travel-stained khaki and transformed myself into a civilian again : and on the following Wednesday boarded the "Scot," then homeward bound on her next voyage, and set sail for home.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MEN WHO FIGHT ENGLAND'S BATTLES.

Before closing this record of some personal experiences of "the strenuous life," I should like to say a final word about the British officer, whom it was my privilege to watch at close range doing the work that only men can do and undergoing those great tests that prove the mettle and the measure of a man. Let me say at the outset that of the officers of all ranks whom I met, on terms of greater or less intimacy, every one, with but few exceptions, extended to me every courtesy, and gave me constant proofs of their wish that only the best of good feeling might prevail between the two great branches of the English-speaking race. "Duke's son, cook's son, son of a belted Earl," all, I found, shared that wish, and looked forward to the time when there would be no possibility of a misunderstanding between the two nations. But I should not be doing justice to the majority of the brave men with whom I was thrown in such close contact, if I did not differentiate between the best type of those I met and the others of Great Britain's army who proved unequal to the trust of upholding her prestige as it would have been upheld throughout South Africa if the inefficient officer

had had fewer opportunities to mar the work of his comrades.

Bismarck is credited with having said once that the British army was a lot of lions led by jackasses. Like most generalizations, this definition was too broad to be strictly true; but it suggests the true explanation of the startling successes gained by the Boers early in the present war, and of the humiliating repulses that have come now and again to interrupt the victorious progress of the British arms.

It has been pointed out in preceding chapters that the Boers are lacking in many of the soldierly qualities necessary to enable them to accomplish what they have accomplished if their enemy had made the most of his opportunities on the battlefields of Natal and elsewhere. If the Boer had been brave in the true sense of the word, Ladysmith, Kimberley, and not impossibly even splendidly-defended Mafeking, would have fallen before the greatly superior forces which in each case were the besiegers; and Cape Colony would have been harried much further south than it has been. And had the Boers been disciplined troops, there would have been something worthy of the name of resistance offered to Lord Roberts between Paardeburg and Pretoria.

But there is no such thing as discipline among the Boers. They elect their own commanders, and obey them until they change their minds, when they at

once reduce them to the ranks again, or expel them from the commando, as they did Piet De Wet, when, in response to the light that was in him, he told them that further resistance was useless and advised them to surrender. And they fight only if and when the mood is on them; never in recognition of such simple duty as obedience to one's commanding officer. Such troops could hardly be expected to put up much of a fight when the odds were not in their favor; and events have plainly shown that they do not do so.

The British private soldier, on the other hand, is disciplined even to a fault. He learned in a few months' practice to shoot better than his foe; and he proved himself brave with the courage of his race. It is not the courage of a bull-dog, to whom resistance and pain act as a tonic; nor that of the Mohammedan fanatic, to whom death in battle is the door to highest happiness. It is the valor of a man who knows just what risks he is facing, not only of death but of disease; who has seen half a dozen of his closest comrades die in agony of unmentionable wounds; and yet who goes up against the hissing rain of bullets with his fellows falling all around him, with a lump in his throat and a clutch at his heart, but yearning only to "get into them with the bayonet;" or stands behind a wall and keeps a host at bay, as seven men at Lindley held back a hundred Boers. And, as if unable to conceal that such courage is a

part of himself, there goes with it a cheerfulness that nothing can daunt. Tommy Atkins does not go into action with a face drawn down with the consciousness of the sacrifice that he is making for his Queen and country, or with any egotistical prayer that his friends at home may realize what a brave fellow he is. He went marching on over parched veldt and past death-lined kopje with a never-faltering cheerfulness. If it was cold, he built himself a bigger fire, and, huddling around it, told horrid tales in a merry voice, and pretended to be warm when he wasn't. If it was wet, with the water ankle-deep around him, and fires were impossible, and only cold rations or none at all were procurable, he sat him down on an ant-hill, gathered his legs up under him, and lustily sang his part in the chorus to "A Life on the Ocean Wave." And on the eve of battle he passed jests with his comrades about "bloody business" and "a bullet in the belly" on the morrow. In brief, Tommy Atkins and his officers in this Boer war have faced death not with the jests of those who never felt a wound, but as men who know both pain and fear and scorn to yield to either. And Europe, crouching for a spring, after watching him for a while thought better of earlier purposes, and Czar and Kaiser prudently closed their doors in the faces of the Boer envoys, impressed as was one of the Russian military attaches, who frankly said that neither his country nor any

other in Europe had any troops to match the British soldier.

Such testimony, and the facts brought out by the war, force one to seek in the character of some of the British officers for the explanation of England's earlier reverses at the hands of such a contemptible foe as the Boer. And there the explanation is not hard to find. The faults of the British military system properly will be, and are being, discussed by military experts; and their correction is well committed to such men as Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener. By them it will be duly made plain by whose fault preference was given to infantry over cavalry in an open country like the South African veldt, and what teaching it was that led General after General to hurl his forces in a frontal attack against an enemy that never would stand when his flanks were threatened. It is sufficient to say here that the system has been such as to enable officers utterly unworthy to rise to positions that they were unfitted to hold. It is undoubtedly true of the British army, as it was of that of the United States at the beginning of the Spanish war, and would be of any other, that years of peace had enabled many officers to attain in the natural course of promotion to high commands who could never have stood the test of war. They remained in the army simply for lack of opportunity to have it proved that they had not retained or never

possessed the necessary military qualifications. But a more serious fact is that the method of obtaining officers and the system of training them are such that only those who originally possess military talents—those who, in other words, are born soldiers—seem enabled to develop into the highest type of commander. The others not only fail to progress; they become more and more hampered by routine and red tape, and finally grow to be nothing but a dead weight in the service.

The regular army, as has often been pointed out, recruits many of its private soldiers from some of the worst classes in the towns and cities: it is often the ne'er-do-well, who has failed to make his way in any other calling, who takes the Queen's shilling, impelled thereto by the martial strains of a recruiting sergeant's band, or by the sight of gay uniforms. But it has proved possible to lick him into shape—to fashion him after a few years of training into as fine a soldier as the Old World can show. The young officer gets no such training. Too often he obtains his commission solely through social influence. Scions of noble houses and sprigs of the aristocracy are bred to look upon the army as the special field in which they may exploit themselves; and young sapheads who would speedily be crowded out of any other field of usefulness find in some crack regiment of guards a congenial stamping ground. *Esprit de corps*, which

is one of the best things about the British army, generally prevents their falling below a certain not too high standard of behavior; they mean to demean themselves as officers and gentlemen should; and they seldom fail to master the not over-abstruse details of barrack drill and garrison routine. But where military ability is not sought for it is not always found; and it is often only when the test of actual war comes that the proofs which justify dismissal or retirement are forthcoming. Some shrewd old officer will have early foreseen that Major Lord This, or Captain the Honorable Mayfair That cannot be got rid of too soon for the good of the service; but the social influence that hedges him in proves a barrier too strong to be surmounted, and he holds his place until some stupid blunder in the field results in the loss of half his men, and justifies his colonel or his brigadier in sending him to the rear or somewhere else out of harm's way. He has not failed in courage; you seldom meet a coward in any army. He has simply proved himself the densest kind of fool, capable as only such an order of blockhead is capable of invariably doing the wrong thing at the critical moment.

They are by no means all that way. The average British officer, if sometimes less quick to adapt himself to his surroundings, and to adopt instinctively the course of action which will prove most efficacious

against the particular foe with which he is dealing, than the quick-witted, resourceful type found in the American army, who at his best is without a peer the world over, is nevertheless a man possessed of the best fighting qualities, and possessed, above all, of that fibre which forces him to take the very last chance to prove that he is not yet beaten—to display that never-say-die spirit which those who are to conquer must never lose. And even when he is slow to see, he is also slow to give in.

But scattered among them all, and holding every rank, you will find the inefficient officer. Neither all, as Bismarck put it, nor most of them are jackasses; but in South Africa you would meet at least one in almost every mess. The general title by which they were known in Tommy's picturesque if inelegant parlance was "bloody fool." Heroic efforts had been made by Lord Kitchener and others who had no patience with inefficiency to post them where they could do the least harm; and towards the end of the war you would meet them in any numbers only in unimportant or comparatively safe depots along the lines of communications, or at Cape Town or elsewhere far from the front; but almost everywhere there were some of them lying about, and the records of the various operations in South Africa are teeming with illustrations of their capacity for getting themselves and their men into trouble. The worst

of it was that where the theatre of war was so extensive, and so many troops were needed, it was impossible for the able generals to dispense with all their incapable subordinates.

That corps of Imperial Yeomanry known as the Duke of Cambridge's Own, and, unofficially, as "The Millionaires," were gathered in by De Wet outside of Lindley because their Colonel didn't know how to select a tenable position nor how to make it more secure, and because, lacking good military judgment, he sent word to Lord Methuen, advancing to his relief after General Colville had declined to turn back, that he could easily hold out for three days longer. Lord Methuen timed his arrival accordingly; but De Wet brought up a couple of guns two days earlier, and the Colonel surrendered just that much ahead of time. Lord Methuen arrived to find nobody to relieve and no captors to attack.

It was the knowledge that the General under whom he was serving had not the qualities to win victories that dashed the hopes of further distinction of many an officer who had proved his worth, in earlier operations, only to be assigned after the crisis was over to the command of some inefficient General whose inevitable failures were certain to rob his subordinates of any further opportunities for distinction. Such a case was that of Colonel Kekewitch, who so ably conducted the defence of Kimberley. His task was

not simply military. Besides overseeing the defences of the town and keeping the Boers at bay, he had to keep in order by the display of infinite tact and cheerfulness a heterogeneous population of which portions were only too willing to find fault and to make harder still the task of the defenders. But after that town was relieved, and his efforts were crowned with the success they deserved, he and his regiment, the Loyal North Lancashires, were assigned to Lord Methuen's division, and one subsequent chance after another of further distinguishing themselves was denied them. Personally, Lord Methuen is one of the most charming of courteous gentlemen: one's ideal of what a man of blood and breeding ought to be. But he is the victim of a lately-developed constitutional weakness which in the excitement of battle clouds clear foresight and judgment and weakens that grasp of the situation which a commander, to be successful, ought always to have. He is as careful and methodical a transport officer as there is in the British army. He lost fewer animals, and, while keeping his force at the top notch of efficiency, got more out of them than any other commander of his rank. But the successful conduct of serious operations in the face of the enemy was beyond him, as Magersfontein, Modder River, and, later, the operations against De Wet, to mention no others, proved.

I have been told, on what is undoubtedly the best

of authority, that Lord Methuen personally was not to blame for the disaster at Magersfontein, which resulted from the failure of one of his subordinates to carry out his orders. But many of his officers told me enough to make it plain that the battle of the Modder should not have been the disaster that it was; and it yet remains to be explained how it was that Lord Methuen failed to prevent De Wet from successfully breaking across the Vaal on the 7th of August, when he had a whole division to head off the Boer force of 3,000. The story is told that De Wet accomplished this by sending six empty wagons with a corps of riflemen to one drift, upon which Lord Methuen, taking the bait, hurled nearly his whole force, thus leaving the way clear for the main body of Boers to cross by another drift a few miles to the east. The truth of this explanation remains to be proved; but De Wet's success must have been due to some such ruse which it ought to have been possible to circumvent. But Lord Methuen was not recalled nor relieved of his command, apparently because the Queen, Lord Wolseley, and his other influential friends at home knew him only for the knightly soldier that he is, *sans peur et sans reproche*, and were unaware of the existence of the infirmity that has clouded his earlier-displayed talents. Lord Roberts noted his failures in the field, but went no further than to isolate him in a section of the country where

the chance of doing brilliant work was almost less than that of making new blunders—a course of action which was so kind as to be cruel to the other officers of Lord Methuen's force. Among other consequences it gave De Wet the chance to say that while Baden-Powell might catch him in one month and French in two, Methuen never could, and to make good his words by marching all his guns and convoy around Lord Methuen's front that night he broke away from Kitchener and Broadwood and Ridley on the Vaal, displaying that same knowledge of the weakness in his enemy's armor which had enabled him to elude Paget and Clements south of Bethlehem three weeks before.

Another General, lower in rank than Lord Methuen but with opportunities for endless mischief which he was never slow to improve, was Hart, who began service under Buller in Natal, where he gained the name of being one of the most conspicuous failures of that campaign. Of Hart it is related that after one particularly disastrous day, in which his forces had suffered heavily, a private whom the General passed after the action was over, called out to him in the bitterness of his heart that he had murdered his regiment. The court-martial that tried the man sentenced him to one day's confinement in the guard-tent, a sufficiently clear reflection of the general opinion as to what that particular brigadier's capaci-

ties were. It was such qualities which brought about the abandonment of Spion Kop after the Boers themselves had deserted the field, and which resulted in the failure to make that one more attack at Stormberg which the Boers were expecting, which, as they themselves subsequently acknowledged, they had decided not to withstand, and which would have changed the rout into a victory.

Another "regrettable incident" which ought not to have occurred was the capture of 500 officers and men of the Derbyshire Militia on the railway near Kopjes Station, in the Orange River Colony. This disaster was due entirely to ignorance and inefficiency on the part of the officers responsible. They selected for their camp a spot in an open, level plain, at the foot of a high kopje, on which they posted a single picket, leaving other kopjes within range unwatched; and, without entrenching or taking any other precautions, the command, which was just out from home, lay down to sleep. With daylight next morning they were fired on. There is a tale to the effect that the Sergeant of the picket came twice early that morning to his commanding officer to report suspicious signs in the neighborhood of the camp, only to be told on the first occasion that he was dreaming and on the second that if he made any more such fool reports he would be disciplined. However that may be, the picket was shortly afterwards driven in:

and although the militiamen, called to arms from their couches, made a splendid stand against three thousand Boers and three guns, losing 35 killed and 102 wounded, they were hopelessly penned in and in the end had no recourse but to yield.

Similarly regrettable was the cutting up outside of Lindley of a four-gun section of the 38th Field Battery, which lost all its officers and seventeen out of fifty men killed or wounded. It is an axiom in battle that guns shall not go into action without an escort. In this case the escort was furnished by 150 men of the Imperial Yeomanry. Yet so carelessly did the officer commanding this escort discharge his duty that a large force of Boers was permitted to creep unseen through a mealie field to within fifteen yards of the guns. Two of the three officers of the battery were killed, the other being twice severely wounded, and one of the guns was captured, to be recovered only by brilliant work by a force of Australian bushmen, who charged down from the rear and drove off the Boers with severe loss.

In the same neighborhood a few days before occurred an incident which shows how Tommy, given the chance, can redeem almost any folly of his officers. A picket of twenty-five men of the Yorkshire Light Infantry outside of Lindley was surprised by one hundred Boers who, dressed in British uniform, had thus found the chance to get within a few hundred

yards. When they opened fire at that deadly distance, the men of the picket saw they were lost unless reinforcements were at once obtained. The only way of communicating with the town was by means of a heliograph, which stood in the open, fully exposed to the Boer fire, and twenty yards away from the wall behind which the picket had taken cover. Private Ward volunteered to go out and signal for aid, and obtained the necessary permission. Dashing out into the zone of fire, he reached the instrument, stood by it long enough to flash the signal, "If help is not sent at once we shall have to surrender," and then ran back for cover. He was hit by a Boer bullet just before he reached the wall: it would have been a miracle if he hadn't been. But he had accomplished his purpose and won the Victoria Cross. The 38th Battery galloped the two miles out from town to find seven survivors of the twenty-five still holding the Boers at bay.

It is indomitable spirit such as this which makes the rank and file of the British army what it is, and which has saved many a situation that by all the laws of war was lost. It is a spirit which Tommy Atkins learns from most of his officers, and which very few even of the "bloody fools" do not possess. And it is the spirit that Americans should glory in as much as Englishmen, for it is born in the blood and bred

in the bone of the race to which we both belong. It
is the spirit of men

“All bound to sing o’ the little things we care about,
All bound to fight for the little things we care about
With the weight of a six-fold blow !”

THE END.

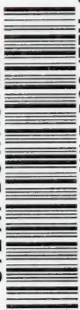
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